MASKS

Benda

MASKS

Step-by-step Series

This volume, MASKS, is the second in a new series of art books stressing the how-to-do-it angle. The first title of this series, OIL PAINTING FOR THE BEGINNER, by Frederic Taubes, was recently published, and the third, PASTEL PAINTING STEP-BY-STEP, by Elinor Lathrop Sears, will soon follow. Other titles will be issued as paper becomes available, covering—largely by means of progressive demonstrations—the method and technique of drawing, painting, etching, lithography, and the like. Each will be by an acknowledged expert. . . . STUDIO SECRETS, by Taubes, published in 1943, while not actually of this series is of the same size and format, and can be considered as the logical sequel to OIL PAINTING FOR THE BEGINNER. . . . A circular describing these and other WATSON-GUPTILL publications is available on request, as is a catalog listing hundreds of art and craft books by other publishers.

MASKS

by

W. T. BENDA

Illustrated by the Author

Introduction by

FRANK CROWNINSHIELD

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Introduction

BY FRANK CROWNINSHIELD

Masks are magic! From the beginnings of history — when superstition was first born—that fact has been generally understood.

No devil-dancer, with any sort of respect for himself, would ever have dreamed of running through his routine with a naked face. No Greek playwright—however confident of his enduring fame—offered his tragedies to an audience without dealing his cast a full deck of formal disguises. No Regency rake—and surely not one so depraved as Lord George Hell, in "The Happy Hypocrite," Max Beerbohm's fable —could have won a maiden so pure and underprivileged as Jenny Mere, without the aid of "a saint's mask—in a rather large size."

But, in recent ages, the western world has neglected this sure source of illusion. And so, perhaps, I was especially enchanted when—on a wind-slit January day in 1920—I first fell under that ancient form of spell. I had called at a vaulted studio overlooking the dim reaches of Gramercy Park—the studio of the Polish-born artist and illustrator, Wladyslaw Theodore Benda, for I had heard that he had long pursued the hobby of creating beautiful, varied, and, sometimes, terrifying masks. I was eager to see the products of that gratuitously contributed "overtime," but I was in no way prepared for the revelation that met me— the breathing beauty that emerged from that gallery of painted faces which—bodiless and without sight—seemed to return my gaze.

In the warm, enveloping light of the waning afternoon, the masks seemed, as worn by the mysteriously robed artist, actually, to move; to change with precisely the moods and reactions of living beings. Fresh and faithful renderings of nature (or else bizarre distortions of it), they

seemed to breathe and possess life. In the case of the women's masks, in particular, the skin seemed warm and delicate; the life-blood, one would swear, pulsing beneath it.

Enchanted with my trouvaille, *I arranged, without a day's delay, to photograph the masks for* Vanity Fair, *a periodical over the destiny of which I was then presiding. And I remember, now, that during the subsequent decade, much of W. T. Benda's work in this vein was to enliven the pages of that, alas, vanished magazine.*

In Athens, the dramatists of the Golden Age relied greatly on masks, and made them a part of their dramas—whether exalted or bawdy. By this means they thought to cancel out the distracting individualities of the actors; to lend the players the dignity and timelessness of abstractions. The theory worked so well that even the hypercritical Athenians crowded into their score or more of al fresco *theatres. On benches, cushioned only with marble—often under a scorching sun—the onlookers sat, enthralled and immobile, stirred to pity, terror, or hilarity, by masked imitators of kings, rogues, warriors, philosophers, seductive* hetaerae, *and omnipotent gods.*

At that distant day, the wearing of a dramatic mask was something more than a routine convention. It was also a feat of strength. For the ancient Grecian masks were extremely ponderous; made, as they were, of faience, or wood, occasionally even of stone. But Benda's masks are made of paper, glued in layers, lacquered, painted, and light as miraculously made soufflées.

Impatient to see Benda's masks in their traditional roles, I prevailed upon the late John Jay Chapman, a literary figure of some little renown, to write, with exactly such masks in mind, a masque, or miracle play. On March 21, 1920, a group of members produced this curious and frightening opus at the Coffee House in New York—a club then entering its fifth year of existence.

Among the dramatis personae who, on that occasion, draped their

figures in mantles, armor, robes, and chiffons—and hid their true faces under many supernatural counterfeits—were the actress, Gilda Varesi; the dancer, Margaret Severn; the poet, Charles Hanson Towne; the novelist, Owen Johnson; and, for good measure, Theodore Steinway, Howard Greenley, and Henry Clapp Smith. With varying shades of zest and aptitude, this group masqueraded as a King, a Devil, a Dragon, a Siren, a Peasant Girl, and as personifications, too, of Avarice, Virtue, and Lust. Efrem Zimbalist, the master violinist, played, for that eerie festival, the most distinguished and appropriate music.

That performance indicated two clear conclusions: (1) that the theatre is made more stirring and illusory by false-face, and (2) that masks can illumine even the most modern type of pantomime.

And what we, at the Coffee House, had proved in the drama, Margaret Severn, a little later, proved in the dance. For ten years, as a result of that evening, Miss Severn toured the country with a professional troupe, interpreting—with the aid of Benda's masks and her perfect dancing and miming—various figures typifying joy, fury, hope, and despair.

Later in the same year (1920), Miss Severn danced—still in masks—in John Murray Anderson's production of the "Greenwich Village Follies," while the next year was to see somewhat similar masks adorning the person of Grace Christie, in London, in a review waspishly entitled, "The League of Notions."

For a long time after that, the Benda masks were in vogue—and in Vogue *as well. The famous photographer, Edward Steichen, took a magnificent series of fashion pictures on someone's large and leafy Long Island estate. At that sitting—or roaming—he posed some of* Vogue's *most elegant and concave models in frocks of organdy and chiffon—as well as in Benda's loveliest masks.*

It is amusing to study those photographs now, for even today, no difference can be seen between the paper-and-paint "complexions" of

the masks and the texture of the living skin revealed by the models' delicate, décolleté dresses. Indeed, many readers of Vogue, *glancing hastily at those pictures (without stopping to ponder the explanatory captions), must have thought the maidens more attractive and spirited than fashion models proverbially are.*

From Warsaw to Buenos Aires, other journals jostled each other in their haste to feature Mr. Benda and his engaging hobby. Le Theâtre *and* The Tatler *hosed him down with rushing streams of praise, while the austere* Encyclopaedia Britannica *asked him to write its definitive article on modern masks—and illustrated it with pages of his own pre-eminent creations.*

In the theatre, a few bright eyes watched this renaissance of magic. Robert Edmond Jones, in his original production of "The Hairy Ape," by Eugene O'Neill, covered his church-goers' faces with sanctimonious masks—with a stifling effect of pseudo-piety. Noel Coward, in his review, "This Year of Grace," used other masks to complete the meaning of the episode entitled "Dance! Little Lady, Dance!"—the flailing feet of the jazz-mad dancers strangely contrasting with their immobile and curiously empty faces.

While Benda has recalled an old art, and one full of supernatural implications, the wizards of Hollywood, when considering scenes demanding faces either gorgeous or grotesque, have preferred to pile transient putty on ephemeral flesh. The screen, in failing to capture the genius of this painter, has missed an excellent chance to enhance its dramas with an extraneous and magical thrill.

The meticulous quality of Benda's masks is not the least of their distinctions. Whereas those of antiquity were often slapdash productions—the handiwork of what passed for witch-doctors and primitive property men—his are invariably exquisite and painstaking works of art.

Benda has done what only a true artist could do. In reviving an old art, he has invented a new.

Contents

FOR CONTENTS IN DETAIL, SEE INDEX

	INTRODUCTION, BY FRANK CROWNINSHIELD	*Page* vii
	FOREWORD, BY THE AUTHOR	xvii
	LIST OF BENDA MASKS	xiii
I.	ILLUSIONS	1
II.	MASKS OF ALL CLIMES AND TIMES	9
III.	MASK-MAKING	21
IV.	HOW I MAKE MY MASKS	31
V.	CIRCUMSTANCES	51
VI.	MASKS AND THE THEATRE	57
VII.	EXPERIENCES OF A MASK-MAKER	61
VIII.	EPISODE OF THE CALF'S EYELASHES	63
	GALLERY OF BENDA MASKS	67
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	125
	INDEX	127

List of Benda Masks

LISTED IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

GOLDEN PEACOCK . . . . . *Frontispiece, facing page* 1; 109, 116

THE OLD WAG 69

GOLDEN BEAUTY 70, 72

THREE MAIDENS 70

EAGLE MAN 71

THE CONSPIRATOR 71

LONG EYES 73, 90

BABOON MAN 74

BEELZEBUB 75

BEAUTE DU DIABLE 76

ALGERIAN DANCER 76

ODALISQUE — TWO VIEWS 77

ENGLISH STATESMAN 78

THE JESTER 79

LADY DISDAIN 80

DOLOROSA 81

CICISBEO 82

VOYEVODE 82

PESTILENCE 83

A VILLAGE SCRIBE 83

A SAD NEGRO 84

UBANGI NEGRO 85

BLUE DEMON AND RAMHORN 86

SEA MONSTER 86

CHINESE DEMON 87

GREEK TRAGOEDIA MASK 87

EXECUTIONER 88

THE SPIRIT OF WAR 89

JAVANESE DANCER 91, 103

PHOENIX 92

WABBLY GOBLIN 92

BIRD OF PREY 93

FURIA 93

KATHARINE HEPBURN 94

A JINNEE 95

WILL-O'-THE-WISP 96

THE BLUE DEMON 97

DON QUIXOTE 98

OCTOGENARIAN 98

RAMHORN 86, 99

A VETERAN 99

PITHECANTHROPUS 100

THE ASCETIC 101

GOLDEN GODDESS 102

MOORISH GIRL 104

CIRCASSIAN 70, 104

SILLY DOLL 105, 117

TATIANKA 105

MORON 106

NINCOMPOOP 107

GEISHA 108

PIRATE 110

THE MISER 110

A SOLDIER 111

PLUTOCRAT 111

I. J. PADEREWSKI 112

ABRAHAM LINCOLN 113

SIOUX INDIAN 114

CALIF AL MANSUR 115

INSECT 116

CLEOPATRA 117

DAPHNE 118

SAPPHO 119

L'HOMME D'AFFAIRES 120

THE LAWYER 121

BEATRICE 122

RUSALKA 123

THE OLD TOWN . . . . . 122 and 123

See also the various sketches, studies, and decorations by Benda scattered throughout the text pages.

Foreword

BY THE AUTHOR

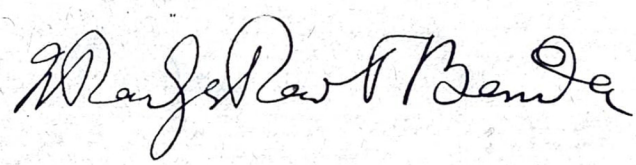
MY PECULIAR BENT for conveying thoughts and feelings by any other medium than words, prompted me to contrive a scheme whereby I could entertain my friends silently by pantomimic acting in character masks of my own making. Is there not, then, more than a little irony in the mischievous trick of fate that has gradually ensnared me into talking about the very masks which I began making expressly to avoid talking? For ever since my false faces have become known, I have been asked to "say something about them," just exactly as though they were made for the purpose of being bragged about. So I have talked, at first timidly, then quite brazenly, till this talking has developed into a persistent habit, whereof the following pages are the outcome and an example.

Although the discussion in these chapters is frankly centered about my own so-called "Benda masks," in its greater part I have dealt with masks of all lands and of all times, aiming to present a general picture of the subject as a background against which to approach the awkward business of speaking of my personal work. This plan involves, at the beginning, some thoughts concerning the attributes common to all masks, wherever, whenever, and by whomsoever made; the element of mystery wherewith they are endowed; the illusions they can produce; and the psychological effect they have on the human soul. Then, after surveying briefly the infinite variety of masks made by the primitive tribes in all parts of the globe, and taking into account the remote antiquity of this art, we shall be ready to observe the relationship

between the masks and the theatre. The story of centuries of neglect, and of the recent attempts at a revival of the use of masks on the stage, completes the general picture.

Against this broad background it will be easier for me to chat about the masks of my own making, to see if they fit into the general scope, to describe how they are made, and to explain their purpose.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those good friends whose stimulating encouragement has made it possible for me to go on for years with my arduous task, and whose good cheer has pulled me through moments of doubt. To them I am indeed indebted.



MASKS

GOLDEN PEACOCK — *A typical mask by Benda, in color and rich gold*

Not even a fine reproduction, such as this direct photograph in full color, can do justice to one of Benda's superb creations. The subtilties of the modeling, the vitality and bloom of the flesh tones, the rich harmonies of both hue and texture, can be scarcely more than suggested by the photo-engraver's art. The inside of a Benda mask receives the same loving care as its exterior, being decorated, often, with gold leaf and conventionalized designs of exuberant hue.

CHAPTER I

Illusions

Principal Illusion

SINCE THE VERY DAWN of humanity, men have been making masks, and the primitive people of today, in all parts of the world, continue making and using them in connection with their ritualistic practices. They treat masks with reverential fear, believing in their supernatural power. This is not surprising, for a mask is a weird, perfidious, and singularly perplexing object. It has a place quite apart among things made by human hands. Looking at it, even we who pride ourselves on our realism and sophistication, are seized by a strange feeling of uncertainty whether peradventure it is not alive. When a mask is put on and enacted by someone, this uncanny quality and the mystification it creates are intensified to the point where the real personality of the masquerader is totally obliterated from our perception; we see only the creature the mask represents. This peculiar power to baffle our senses which all masks, good or bad, possess, gives us a sensation of mystery; small wonder that it causes the minds of savages to believe in magic properties of masks.

Not only is one who puts on a mask seemingly transformed into the being the mask portrays, but he himself is aware of this strange metamorphosis. Those who look at him are puzzled by the change in his appearance and in his behavior, for the wearer of a mask yields subconsciously to the irresistible impulse to act like the being the mask typifies; curiously enough, he cannot get rid of the weird delusion that he really *is* that being; he does not act any more like himself, but assumes

the character and every movement of that creature. If he has never before shown any histrionic ability, he surprises us by now acting convincingly and with uncommon zest. We, who see him so transformed, cannot behave toward him in our usual manner, and something prevents us from talking to him the same way as before. The man we knew seems to have disappeared, and the creature that has replaced him we feel compelled to treat according to the emotions its face stirs within us, forgetting constantly that this is only a false face. The transformation fascinates or amuses us, but it also bewilders and disturbs us.

All this is not due to any exceptional merit of the artist who made the mask, but is caused by the way we perceive things; it is the result of certain preconceived ideas of ours which have developed through our intercourse with our fellow men, and on which we can normally rely, but which have now been trapped by the insidious substitution of a false face for a real one. In our inter-human relations, the faces of our fellow men are of paramount importance to us. We depend on them to give us the information we need about the souls of those with whom we come in contact. It is by his face that we know a person—it is his face that can reveal to us much of what we want to learn about his character, his moods, and his attitude toward us, as well as toward the world. We are accustomed thus to judge others by their countenances and to let our feelings toward them be swayed accordingly. It is indeed a habit firmly imbedded in our nature, to take the faces of our fellow men as true and infallible indexes of their souls. We have such implicit trust in their correctness, and respond to them so spontaneously, that when a living face is replaced by a mask—when the false index is substituted for a true one—we still let ourselves be guided by it. As a result, we are misled, confused, and a strange feeling of mystery gets hold of us. Even the masquerader's body appears to have changed its character and its proportions; it seems to belong integrally to the mask, while its every movement confirms the presence of a new individuality. We are indeed perplexed.

Auxiliary Deceptions

This principal illusion, created by wearing a mask, is accompanied by, or rather consists of, various minor deceptions which we should consider here and try to explain. For clarity's sake, though, we have to limit ourselves to a few simple examples, leaving out the more subtle aspects of the matter.

First, as was just indicated, we are astonished to discover that, as our masquerader changes from one mask to another, his stature seems to change its proportions; he appears to be once taller, once shorter. A mask smaller than his face gives him the appearance of being taller, while a large mask dwarfs him. We get this impression because our eye, without our realization, is accustomed to judge the height of people by the proportion of the head to the body. In nature there is little difference between the sizes of heads of tall and short men, but the tall man's height is eight times the length of his head while a short fellow may measure scarcely seven heads. Our eye knows it, and that is precisely why it can be deceived when confronted with the same variety of proportions obtained by changing the sizes of the masks on the same figure.

Another interesting illusion is the impression that the mask changes expressions. This is particularly the case with masks endowed with delicate nuances and subtle complexes of expressions, where mild sadness, for example, may mingle with a scarcely discernible suggestion of a smile, or, let us say, where an angry frown and an expression of sorrow dwell together. When such a mask moves—as it assumes various positions, and as we see it at different angles—once one, then another, of these expressions dominates, giving the impression that the rigid features of the mask come to life.

Other less subtle masks can also produce, though in a lesser degree, this illusion of changing expressions while their wearer acts. We have a preconceived idea that all facial expressions are due to the muscular contractions in the face itself, and we do not realize how much the

movements or positions of the head, the neck, and even the shoulders, have to do with them. Thus, for instance, a frown has quite a different meaning with the chin up than when the head is lowered. In the first position, it suggests courage and aggressiveness but, in the other, worry or gloomy meditation. A gentle smile becomes an arrogant sneer or a supercilious grin when the chin is raised, but with the head bent down, it may suggest timidity or else it becomes a silly smirk.

We do not realize how little we actually see of the facial expressions of an actor when we are sitting in the last row of the theatre. What our physical eye really sees is the actor's movements that express certain moods and feelings, and it is our subconscious mind that fills the gap, knowing from experience what facial changes accompany these movements. It is in the same way that we see the changing expressions of a mask.

The Masquerader's Delusion

When our masquerader unmasks, if he is in any degree observing and communicative, he will tell us what a peculiar experience he had behind the mask; how his soul was suddenly released from the usual constraint of self-consciousness, what freedom of movement he experienced, how naturally and spontaneously he could act, and how irresistible was the urge to express in movements the character of the mask. He may also confess that in fact he imagined himself to be the creature he represented. But what astonished him most was the way his face endeavored to mimic the features and the expression of the mask he was wearing. He will complain that his face was doing this obstinately, in spite of his reasoning that this was an absurdly wasted mimicry. To one who never played with masks, this may seem to be an unbelievable exaggeration, a product of the masquerader's imagination, but he was right. What he will tell us is the experience of anyone who puts on a mask and acts. The masquerader's experience puzzled him, for he forgot for the time that, since his whole body assumed the characteristic motions and

attitudes of the creature the mask represented, his face was forced to act in accordance with the laws of rhythmic coordination and feign the character and mood in concord with the expressive action of the rest of his body. We are so made that it is impossible, or at least most unnatural, for us to express one mood by the action of our bodies and simultaneously another by our facial expressions.

The Eyes

Eyes are an important factor in masks, yet most masks have no eyes and they are more effective because of that.

Quite a paradox! Let us try to unravel it.

In the first place, the expression "no eyes" means that most masks have holes in place of the visible parts of the eyeballs.

It is rather interesting, and perhaps puzzling, that these holes do not destroy—or at least disturb—the life-like appearance or beauty of these masks. But this is chiefly because it is the framing of the eyes that gives them character and expression, while the eyeballs by themselves have neither, for they are all alike; they can therefore be omitted from the mask without being missed.

More to the point is the question, why should there be such holes at all?

The first — a very obvious reason — is, of course, to permit the mummer to see from behind the mask.

The other — a somehow mysterious reason or purpose — is to heighten the mask's impressiveness and illusory power by taking advantage of certain defects, or, let us say, peculiarities in human perception.

To clarify this, let us recall that our seeing apparatus consists of the physical and mental elements. While our bodily eye records merely the size, the shape, the color, and the movement of the observed object, our mental eye, relying on the knowledge derived from its previous experiences with objects similar to the one observed, imposes its explanatory

commentaries and gives a meaning to the simple optical impression. But that mental eye is far from being infallible. When it stumbles against some unexpected feature, which, according to its logic and experience, fails to conform with the general aspect of the object observed, it is apt to overlook the presumably incongruous detail and persuades itself that all is as it was in other objects of the same category previously seen. It gives us then a misleading interpretation which constitutes our delusion.

This is exactly what happens when we observe an eyeless mask in action, especially if its features possess sufficient suggestion of life. Then our mental eye, not being able to adjust itself to the idea that there could be eyeholes amid the animated features, overlooks the holes entirely, and, deriving its notions from all its former encounters with living human countenances, expects the mask, which appears to be alive, also to have living eyes. As the human eyes are endowed with considerable mobility and do their part in every move and every emotion, our mental eye concludes that the eyes of the mask, in every analogous circumstance, must behave the same as human eyes would do. We then obtain the illusion or a vague sensation that the mask has active eyes—we are vaguely conscious of their presence.

The effect of masks endowed with eyes furnished by their maker is altogether different. Such eyes are of course immobile. As long as a mask of this kind hangs undisturbed, it may be quite convincing and impressive, but as soon as someone puts it on and starts to act in the same way as with other masks, all its intended impressiveness and illusion is destroyed by the fixed stare of the eyes. This immobility is stubbornly retained through all the motions and emotions of its wearer, whose best efforts at acting lose all significance through the refusal of the eyes to collaborate; such a fixed stare is too conspicuous a feature to pass unnoticed either by our physical or our mental vision.

Here, it may seem, the conclusion should be that only masks made

to decorate walls may afford to display eyes with advantage to their good looks, while all masks used in masquerading and acting should be doomed to have their eyes cut out, for fear they might disgrace themselves otherwise.

But things are not as bad as all that, as there are some exceptions.

There are acting masks of extreme or exceptional characters meant to frighten, to give shudders, or to amuse, which must be equipped with strange, unusual eyes: terrifying, weird, uncanny, or ridiculous eyes. But the wearer of such masks must be fully aware of these eyes and limit or modify his acting accordingly, eliminating all slow motions and relying on prolonged, steady stares in one or another definite direction, with swift, transitory movements in between.

The "Eagle" mask (page 71), for example, will fix the sharp and stern gaze of his golden irises at one point; then, with a sudden jerk of his head, nail his steady stare to some other focus, and so on. (This, by the way, is how an eagle really behaves.)

Then there is the "Beelzebub" mask (page 75), meant to frighten the spectator with his ferocious, bulging eyes, and the "Furia" (page 93) with her wild bloodshot eyes. Their action should have similar limitations.

The preposterously wide open eyes of such comical masks as "The Silly Doll" (pages 105 and 117) or "The Nincompoop" (page 107) can stand any kind of droll acting. The absurdity of their constant stare, contrary to nature and reason, having no relation with the motions and emotions expressed by the actor, creates an outrageously ludicrous effect, which excites mirth, thus achieving the very purpose of such masks.

Conclusion

The above-described reactions of the spectator and the masquerader demonstrate our susceptibility to the mysterious power of deception with which masks are endowed, and this refers to all masks, good ones

and poor ones, ancient or modern, realistic or fantastic, those made by primitive tribesmen or those made by artists of civilized countries.

Which brings us back to our point that if, then, we who are brought up in the midst of our modern, matter-of-fact civilization, may be thus mystified by a mask, there is small wonder that the primitive savages in many parts of the world can strongly believe in magic properties and supernatural power of masks.

CHAPTER II

Masks of all Climes and Times

Primitive Tribes and Their Masks

MASK-MAKING IS ONE of the most ancient of arts. Since time immemorial, natives of all parts of the world have been making masks and using them in various ways. This is preeminently an art of primitive people in whose lives masks play a major part. The more advanced barbarians take them less seriously; in ancient Greece and Rome, masks found application in the theatre, but modern civilization neglected and almost forgot the art of making and using them till the recent revival.

Among the primitive tribes a mask has a singular significance. In their estimation a mask is not a thing to be played with, or to be treated frivolously. Only certain privileged individuals have the right to put it on. To the mind of a savage a mask has an occult meaning; it is believed to be endowed with magic properties and to possess power over men, beasts, and spirits. Even the elements are believed to be subject to its influence. A mask is regarded by the primitive tribes as a fetish permanently inhabited by a powerful spirit, benevolent or malicious, as the case may be. Hence, it inspires awe, and mystery envelops it. Masks play an important part in religious ceremonies of the savage, and their ritual applications are manifold.

The shamans, medicine men, or witch doctors put on masks to invoke spirits or to propitiate the elements. They do so to bring about rain in time of drought, to cure maladies, or to assure the success of a hunt, and they do this in unshaken belief that the spirit of the mask is

more powerful than the spirits governing the elements. There are also other ways in which the primitive people make use of masks. Leaders of tribes appear from time to time wearing grotesque, formidable masks to exhort their people and to coerce them into subordination and good behavior.

It is interesting to note that primitive tribes all over the world, sometimes so far apart that by no stretch of the imagination could we see how they could possibly at any time influence each other, make similar or, in some instances, identical use of masks. There is something peculiarly significant in this ubiquity of the same idea, and it seems to prove that there is some elemental affinity between the soul of primitive mankind and this need of masks and masking.

American Indians

Among the Indians of America, those of the Northwest Coast are the mask-makers par excellence. They are the Tlingit Indians of Alaska and the Kwakiutl, Haida, and Vancouver Indians of British Columbia. They form a distinct group, whose fascinating masks are very different from all others made on this continent. They are boldly carved in wood and painted with earth colors, sometimes embellished with incrustations of abalone shells, bone, or copper. In clear-cut, rhythmic lines and a limited number of planes, retaining only that which is essential to type, they portray in a vigorous and convincing manner human or animal characters, showing the maker's keen observation of nature, fine sense of beauty, and remarkable skill.

The firebird, the whale, and the human or semi-human face are their most often repeated themes. Unique are their ingeniously constructed double masks, where the outer, representing an animal's head, opens on hinges, revealing the inner one, usually of human type.

These are ceremonial masks made for use in initiation and other ritual ceremonies. They represent, under the guise of human or animal

forms, the ancestral spirits, and they have direct connection with the animistic belief (the belief in metempsychosis), according to which the souls of dead men enter the bodies of animals, trees or stones; they also enter masks. Thus, by the wearing of masks, one can keep in contact with the souls of dead ancestors and obtain their valid help, for they are demigods.

(There is a very complete and instructive collection of Northwest American Indian masks in the American Museum of Natural History, New York.)

Indians of the Southwest, of New Mexico, and of Arizona, make quite a different kind of mask. The Zuni, Hopi, Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache tribes show close affinity in their conception and execution. They make masks of rawhide or cloth, dipped in whitish or grey clay, giving them usually cylindrical shapes, with rectangular apertures for the eyes and mouth. Naturally, masks constructed that way bear only a vague resemblance to the human face. They are decorated with symbols designed in black and dull red, and adorned with feathers and wool. It is their symbolical meaning that counts. Many of these masks represent ancestral spirits called *kachinas*. The Apache masks bear a superstructure of wooden tablets and rods, gaily colored, symbolizing the heavenly bodies and atmospheric phenomena.

In the East, the most noteworthy for their impressiveness, as well as for skilful workmanship, are the *gogosa*—the grim, if not ominous-looking, masks made and used by members of the Falseface Society of the Five Nations; that is, the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Oneida tribes, belonging to the great Iroquois Confederacy founded by Hiawatha. These masks are carved in wood and painted, in most cases, red, the color that is thought to render them particularly efficacious in influencing the elements or curing diseases. Most of them have horsehair wigs and large gleaming eyes, which are flat disks of polished copper or shell. In the flickering light of a bonfire, they certainly look

like malevolent spirits.

The Iroquois have for every purpose and occasion a different kind of mask. So there are clan masks, medicine masks, and harvest masks; there are masks controlling the winds, miniature maternity masks carried by expectant mothers, and scalp masks worn by the warriors when displaying their trophies.

Joseph Keppler, who was adopted by the Senecas, and knows more about these Indians than any other white man, gives, in his *Comments on Certain Iroquois Masks,* a very interesting account of the use of masks among the confederate tribes. He says that on the advent of some grave crisis, as an epidemic or other calamity, the members of the Falseface Society, seeking to avert a disaster by the influence of masks, make the most potent of all the masks, the *Gahadagoka gogosa,* which, according to established ritual, must be carved out of the trunk of a living basswood tree. As this must be done with the acquiescence of the tree, the tree is addressed with a harangue, with prayers and apologies amidst ceremony and incantations.

(The Museum of the American Indian, New York, has an extensive collection of Iroquois masks.)

The medicine men of all the above-mentioned tribes of American Indians put on masks to perform the magic of curing diseases, of inducing the rain to fall on the scorched earth, of sending game into the hunter's path, or of chasing away evil spirits that harass the tribes. To achieve this, they go through weird dances, full of allegorical significance; they chant invocations; they shake their magic tortoise shell rattles and make mysterious symbolic gestures. They give the impression of being in spiritual communion with the unseen forces, and they themselves believe they are. They do not try to deceive their people. They have firm faith in the magic power of the masks they wear and in the efficacy of their methods. If their magic fails too often, they are in danger of falling into disgrace and exposing themselves to the

vengeance of the tribe.

The Aztecs, Toltecs, and Mayans, of old Mexico, used to make their masks often of thin sheets of gold. Their kings and priests put them on upon certain occasions. Gold and silver masks were also made by the Chimu Indians of Peru, who adorned their mummies with them.

As Central and South American Indians from the Amazon River (the Lengua tribe) through Brazil and Argentina to Terra del Fuego, make and use masks of more or less primitive type, the continuity of Indian masks from Alaska to the southern tip of South America is complete.

Africa

In Africa, the native mask-making is confined to the equatorial belt, from the eighth degree N. lat. to about the eighth degree S. lat., and from the western shores to the sources of the Nile and Lake Tanganyika. This is the territory of the true Negro type and of fetishism. North and west of these limits are the countries under the domination of Mohammedanism, and as this religion prohibits sculpturing or painting of human or animal likenesses, mask-making is definitely tabooed; while in the South the advancement of Christianity has subdued fetishism, and with it the use of masks.

Thus the countries of the mask-making belt from west to east are: Liberia (the Kru tribe), Ivory Coast, Gold Coast (Ashanti), Slave Coast, Nigeria, Kamerun, Congo, and Tanganyika Territory.

Most of the African masks are carved in wood. They are either black with waxy polish or painted white with markings in various colors. They portray human features or animal types in styles varying from the simplest realism to extreme conventionalization and fantastic exaggerations. Very interesting are the often repeated, highly stylized gorilla, elephant, and antelope masks.

Among the limitless multiplicity of highly diversified African masks of human types, there are some that show the remarkable knowledge

and sensitive touch of the artist, and can safely stand comparison with the best sculpture of the world.

The African natives, besides using their masks in ritualistic ceremonies and shamanistic magic, which is almost universal among primitive savages, found another application for them; they employ them as a means of coercion. In the Congo and in Kamerun, groups of men, organized in so-called secret societies, under the guise of masks, terrorize the people of the tribes. Wearing ominous-looking masks, they emerge unexpectedly from the jungle. They spread terror, exhort the people, coerce them into what in their estimation is good behavior, find the guilty ones, and punish them. Due to their uncanny appearance, they are taken for supernatural beings, inspire awe, and are obeyed. If their integrity is high, they may act as the legitimate tribal government; if they are scoundrels, the tribes suffer. At any rate, they make you think of the Spanish Inquisition, of the Ku Klux Klan, or of our racketeers. Behind their masks the members of these secret societies maintain strict incognito. Nobody knows who they are and nobody wants to know. If anyone has the bad luck to discover accidentally the identity of one of them, he is in danger of losing his life before he has time to divulge his discovery to others.

Oceania

In the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, the Polynesians and the Micronesians do not count as mask-makers, but the protomorphic people of Melanesia rank high. The Papuans of New Guinea, and the inhabitants of New Britain, New Ireland, New Hebrides, and New Caledonia, make a great variety of strangely fantastic masks, which they carve in wood or weave out of various fibres and adorn with feathers. These bizarre creations are as a rule large, some of them tremendous, often reaching fifteen feet in height. As the cult of dead ancestors is widespread in Melanesia, many of the masks there portray their features. In New Guinea, the Duk-duk men wear enormous masks when they

invade villages to coerce the people, very much with the same purpose and in the same manner as the secret societies of Kamerun. This is a noteworthy similarity, if we consider the vast racial difference and the great distance between New Guinea and Kamerun, which is just about half the way around the globe. It is one of those mysteries that ethnopsychologists may try to solve.

Asia

Asia presents quite a different aspect when the use and significance of masks is the issue. As most of the Asiatic people emerged from the state of primitive savagery many centuries ago and are now living in the state of barbarism, while some of them have attained a high degree of civilization, belief in the magic power of the mask, so firmly rooted among savages, has waned or disappeared altogether.

In most of Asia (with the exception of the northern regions inhabited by primitive Siberian tribes, and among the Singalese of Ceylon, where diseases are still cured by the magic of masks) fetishism, the staunch supporter of the belief in the magic power of masks, long since gave way to various forms of paganism, which in turn were supplanted by such higher religions as Buddhism, Lamaism, Brahmanism, Shinto, Mohammedanism and the teachings of Confucius, Lao-Tsze and Zoroaster.

Tibet

Of these, only the Tibetan Lamaism, that strange mixture of Buddhism and Shamanism, retains the use of masks in connection with its rituals. At the Potala lamasery near Lhasa, and at Tashi Lumpo in the vicinity of Shingatse, the lamas impersonate various demons in dance and pantomime, wearing gorgeously embroidered costumes and colorful masks, some with horns or antlers, some skull-like, some painted blue or scarlet like so many *apparitions de profundis.*

As civilization advances—as sophistication pervades the mind of

man—the mask loses something of its mystery and becomes an object of beauty, having connection with entertainment, with theatre, and with dance.

In Japan, China, and Java, masks are used in theatrical productions, some of which still show a remote affinity to religious cults.

Japan

The Japanese excel in mask-making. They use their masks in the ceremonial "No" dramas, introduced by the shogun Yoshimitsu in the fourteenth century, aristocratic court affairs with well-established and strictly defined code and form, acted by men of the élite, before select audiences. The actors, in magnificent robes of silk and gold, perform every movement with rhythm and traditional elaboration. The "No" masks are exquisitely carved and painted with tempera colors over a ground of gesso, characterizing with fine clear-cut definition a variety of human types and supernatural beings. These are small, shallow masks, covering the actor's face not quite to the ears. They represent about one hundred traditional characters.

The Kiogen masks are quite different. They are mostly caricatures used in comic pantomimes.

Still another category of Japanese masks is used in solemn, semi-religious performances called Gigaku. It comprises masks of highly diversified, vigorous characterization. They are large, covering three-quarters of the masker's head. Curious are the exaggerated features of these masks, in contradistinction to the broad, rather flat character of the natives' faces.

China

In China, masks are used in the theatre only in certain cases. As a rule, the Chinese actors put on their faces elaborate make-up of conventional, stylized design, which they do with remarkable skill and precision. These patterns of contrasting, clearly defined colors — usually

black, red, and white—are copied from miniature masks made for that purpose. A face made up in this fashion looks for the world like a mask, and in fact it can be regarded as one.

The Chinese also make gaily colored papier-maché masks for use in pageants, but these have either little or no artistic value.

Java and Bali

In Java, dramatized versions of local legends and episodes from the Sanskrit epics, *Mahabharata* and *Rāmayana,* are enacted in three different ways: by shadow marionettes, by three-dimensional puppets, or by actors wearing masks. In the shadow shows, called Wayang Puerwa, the strange-looking marionettes with very long arms and elongated features are cut out of buffalo hide with beautiful, lace-like patterns of perforations. They are manipulated from below by means of sticks attached to their arms. A concentrated light from a lantern throws their magnified shadows on a screen. The élite audience sees the puppets themselves, while the populace looks at the shadows from the other side of the screen.

Wayang Golek is a regular marionette show with three-dimensional puppets, which are also moved by sticks from below instead of by strings from above. The manipulator, or dalang, makes the puppets act while he speaks the lines of the play.

The masks worn by the Javanese actors in the Wayang Topeng, or the stage versions of these plays, represent heroes, gods and demons. They are small, beautifully stylized, and remarkably expressive. Most of them are painted white with reserved design in black, red, and gold. Their often repeated, characteristic features are long noses, round, bulging eyes, and buck teeth. A Javanese mask is fitted just behind its mouth with a little strap which the actor takes in his teeth to hold the mask in place. He acts in pantomime while the dalang speaks the lines.

The Balinese mask-makers use the same technic as those in Java,

but their masks are vividly colored and tend more toward the grotesque.

Borneo

Very distinctive and quite impressive are the weird wooden masks made by the savages of Borneo. They are of much more primitive conception and cruder workmanship than those of Java and Bali. Their chief peculiarity is in the presence of the large ornaments of involved jigsaw patterns hinged to their sides.

Siam and Cambodja

The Siamese and the Cambodjan papier-maché masks, worn by dancers and portraying gods, heroes, and monkeys, have high and pointed superstructures shaped like the towers and turrets of Bangkok temples. They are covered with minute ornamentation, profusely gilded and gaily colored.

Prehistoric Europe

Let us now see what Europe has to show us in the way of masks. It may seem unbelievable, but there are proofs, or at least strong indications, that about fifteen thousand years ago, which means in the Old Stone Age, the cavemen of Europe were already using masks. The prehistoric men of that epoch depicted masks and maskers on the walls of the caves of Southern France.

Ancient Greece and Rome

Before the mask found its way into the Greek Theatre, it had already had a very long history. The use of masks in Greece must have had its beginning in primitive animistic rites, as everywhere else. Much later it appeared at the orgiastic dances in honor of Dionysus and Apollo. It held its place in the development of religious drama and finally found its application in the classic tragedy and comedy.

As these dramas were enacted in open-air theatres before audiences

of thirty thousand or more spectators, it was necessary to enhance the stature of the actors and to magnify the volume of their voices. The *coturnus,* or stilts, attached to the soles of the actor's sandals, added some ten inches to his height, and the large mask, made in proportion to this artificial height, together with a voluminous toga, completed the desired magnification of his stature. An exaggeratedly wide-open mouth of the mask, fitted with a funnel through which he spoke, amplified his voice.

None of the Greek theatrical masks, which probably were wooden, were preserved to our times. All we know about their appearance is from stone or bronze replicas used as motives in architectural ornamentation, or from paintings on vases and amphoras. Thus we learn that these masks were vigorously modeled and conventional in form; that they expressed various elemental moods such as grief, anger, horror, sadness, or joy, to which the differences of types were subordinated.

The ancient Greeks were also making several other kinds of masks which had different purposes to fulfill. There were masks for mimetic dances, mortuary masks, votive masks, masks hung on trees to stimulate fruit bearing, portrait masks and decorative masks in marble and terra cotta.

Rome inherited from Greece the use of masks in the drama.

Mystery Plays and Comedia dell' Arte

Most of the mystery plays of the Middle Ages were enacted with masks, and in the sixteenth century, in accord with the general trend of the Renaissance, the revival of classic comedy took place in the form of *comedia dell' arte,* which really had very little resemblance to its prototype, except for the fact that it also employed masks. But even these were very different; they were small half-masks, leaving the actor's mouth free. In the *comedia dell' arte,* such standard characters as Pierrot, Punchinello, Harlequin, Pantalone, and others were originated. They were later in vogue in carnivals and masquerades, and

reappear in mardi-gras festivities today. Outside of these, there are but few vestiges left in Europe of traditional uses of masks.

In Switzerland and in Tyrol the peasants have a distinct type of grotesque masks, portraying devils, witches, dragons, and all sorts of queer animals. These they put on in the weeks following Christmas.

Polish Jaselka

In Poland there exists an ancient custom called Jaselka, which has its origin in Slavonic pagan winter solstice rites, but the advent of Christianity changed its meaning and connected it with Christmas celebration. Between Christmas and Twelfth-night, groups of peasants, men and boys, costumed and masked, going from house to house, perform pantomimic dances and sing carols to the accompaniment of fiddles and bass. They impersonate St. Nicholas, an angel, a devil, and a strange-looking creature called Turon, covered with a black cowhide and wearing a mask with long horns and crocodile jaws that open on hinges, showing a red flannel tongue. He is the chief performer; he dances bear-fashion, snaps his long jaws with a loud clapping noise, and swings his cow tail ferociously, not knowing even whence he came, for, in Polish, *turon* or *tur* means bosurus or reem, a bovine long extinct before Christianity had reached Poland.

CHAPTER III

Mask-making

A Specific Form of Sculpture

To MAKE A MASK is an arduous task. It involves choosing an impressive subject, visualizing it clearly, planning the manner of its execution, and then plunging into laborious and complicated work, bristling with always new problems. Mask-making is a peculiar kind of sculpture where one must at the same time consider the esthetic and the practical side of it, the exterior and the interior of the mask, the character it is intended to represent, and the fitting to the head of the wearer. One must also remember to make the mask as thin as possible, and yet strong and durable.

Choosing a Theme

The mask-maker should never have occasion to despair for want of inspiration; his field is limitless, the number and variety of subjects inexhaustible. On the contrary, he runs the danger of being overcrowded with visions of types and characters which beg to be made into masks. If there is anything that could trouble him, it would be the difficulty of making a good choice from these swarms of faces that present themselves. Whether his mood leads him into the realm of drama and romance, or his humor makes him choose caricature, or his imagination runs wild into fantastic exaggerations, he will never feel the lack of new inspirations, and the longer he keeps at it, the bigger will grow the multitude of suggestions.

If he chooses the field of drama, he will make masks of warriors,

savants, or prophets, and endow their features with all that expresses lofty aspirations, courage, wisdom, or dignity. He may depict endurance, stolidity, or meekness in his types of churls, grave-diggers, candlestick makers; or he may typify presumption, greed, bestiality, and all that is sinister or malevolent in his masks of tyrants, hypocrites, or conspirators.

Feminine loveliness, its elusive qualities, its hardly discernible nuances of features and expression, will inspire him to create alluring maidens with mystifying, evanescent smiles; exuberant beauties, tearful heroines of sad romances, wistful little girls, oriental goddesses, houris, bayaderas, and odalisques; seductive, enigmatic, languid.

Then there is waiting for his exploration the great field of humor, comedy, satire, and caricature, crowded with pompous prigs, absurd little kings, simpletons, wags, and all sorts of rapscallions, scalawags, ragamuffins, and razzle-dazzle tatterdemalions.

He may also give full sway to his imagination, break away from the last vestiges of realism, lose all fear of exaggeration, and produce extravagantly fantastic creatures, whose chief beauty shall lie in their structure, in rhythmic coordination of lines and surfaces, enhanced by bold color, unhampered by realities, his taste being the only judge. Demons, spectres, sprites, hobgoblins, fairies, dryads, and nymphs will thus come to life, if only our mask-maker bears in mind that their meaning, after all, symbolic or direct, is their chief raison d'etre. Consequently their character and every line of their features should evolve from that meaning and be in harmony with it, no matter how far from realism the creature may be, how daring its exaggeration. (See the sketches which follow.)

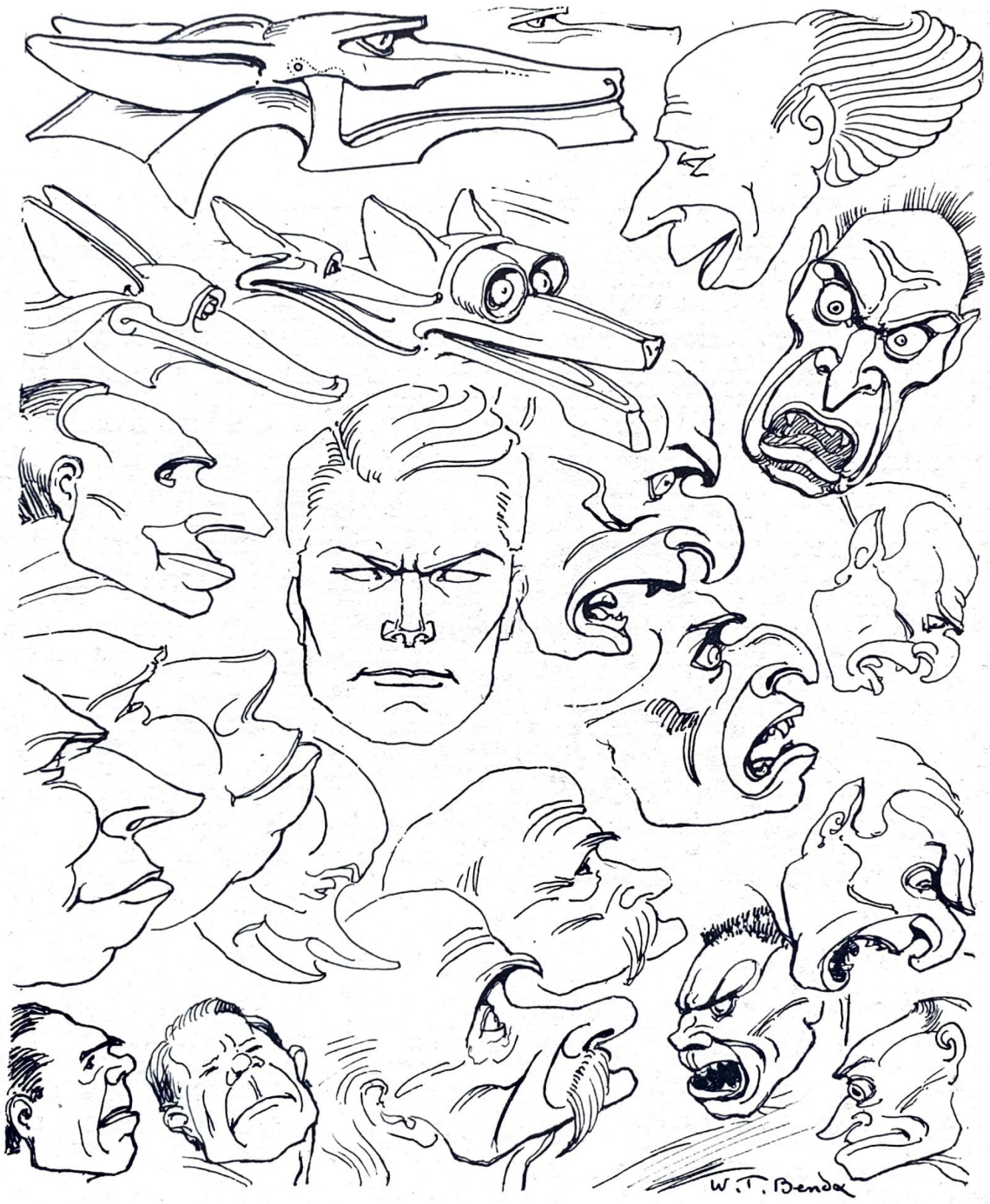
But when indulging in exaggeration, one must not forget for an instant that even the most extravagantly fantastic conceptions must have their foundation in the principles of rhythmic coordination and must be based on persistent and introspective study of nature. Although this applies to all the arts, it has a very special meaning to the maker of masks,

particularly when his creations are to be highly stylized, fantastic, or exaggerated, and the further he strays from realism the more attention he will have to pay to these principles. Without them, he would be groping in a haze of vagueness and uncertainty, and, consequently, the results of his struggle would be nothing but deplorable banalities, no matter how fine were his original ideas, how elevated his thoughts at the inception of those ideas. Hence, all the emphasis on this point is not without good reason.

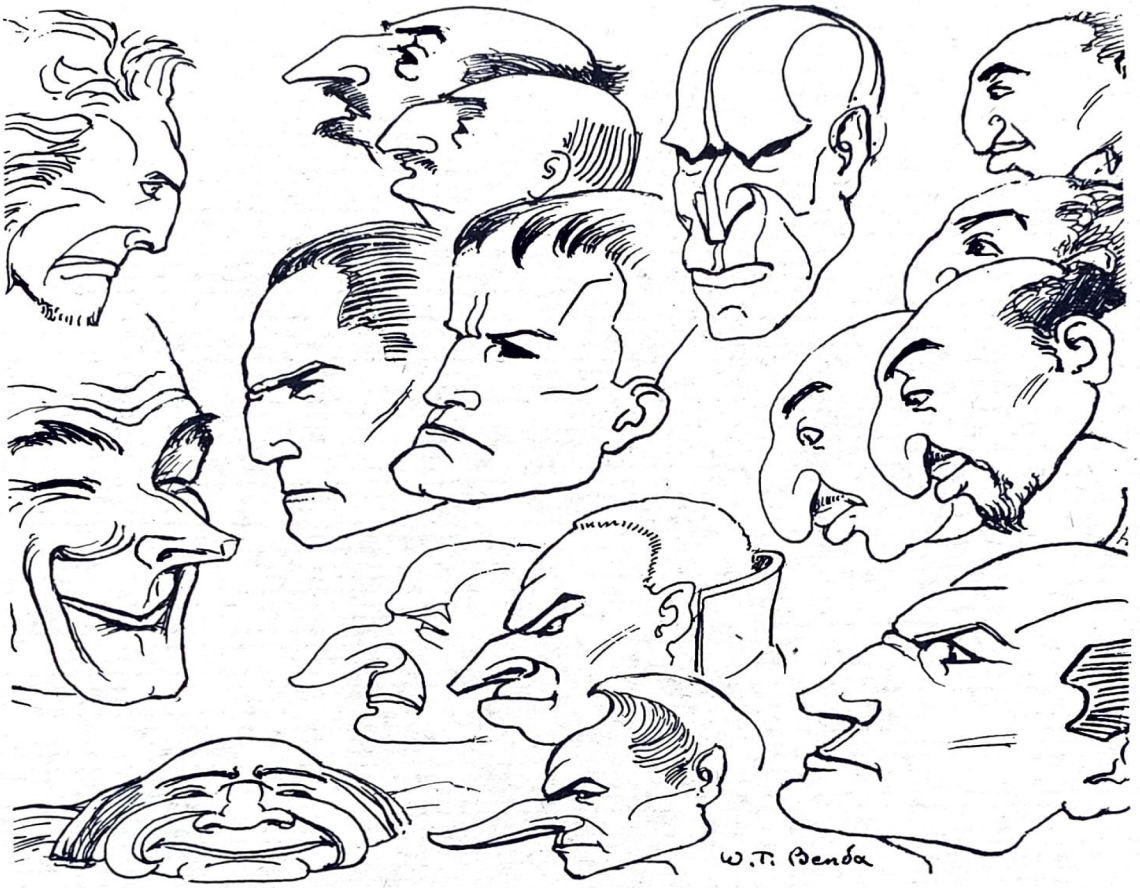
We must also lay stress on another point — on the importance of making the masks impressive. Since the principal purpose of masks is to stir a wide scope of varied emotions in the onlooker's soul, the maker must constantly bear in mind this purpose; he must do everything in his power to intensify this quality in the mask he is creating, eliminating all that does not lead directly toward that goal. He must think of it from the very beginning of his idea, through all the intermediate stages of the construction, right through to the last finishing touches, for even a wrong texture of the surface of the mask may detract from the intended impression. Whether his masks are meant to amuse or to mystify us, whether their purpose is to startle, to give us shudders, to induce us to dream, or to appeal directly and solely to our sense of beauty, he must always be intensely conscious of this clearly defined purpose.

There are various kinds of suggestions that may inspire a modern maker of masks to create a certain type. Of course, the simplest and the most usual are the suggestions derived from observation and comparison of human faces, which just need to be intensified, simplified, and stylized to become masks. (See the following illustrations.)

But at times a single feature, a certain peculiarity, may become a theme for a mask in which, around this one characteristic, the rest of the face shall be logically developed according to all the principles of rhythm and coordination. As a simple example, we may take the case where an unusually prominent and peculiarly shaped nose is the theme. The rest



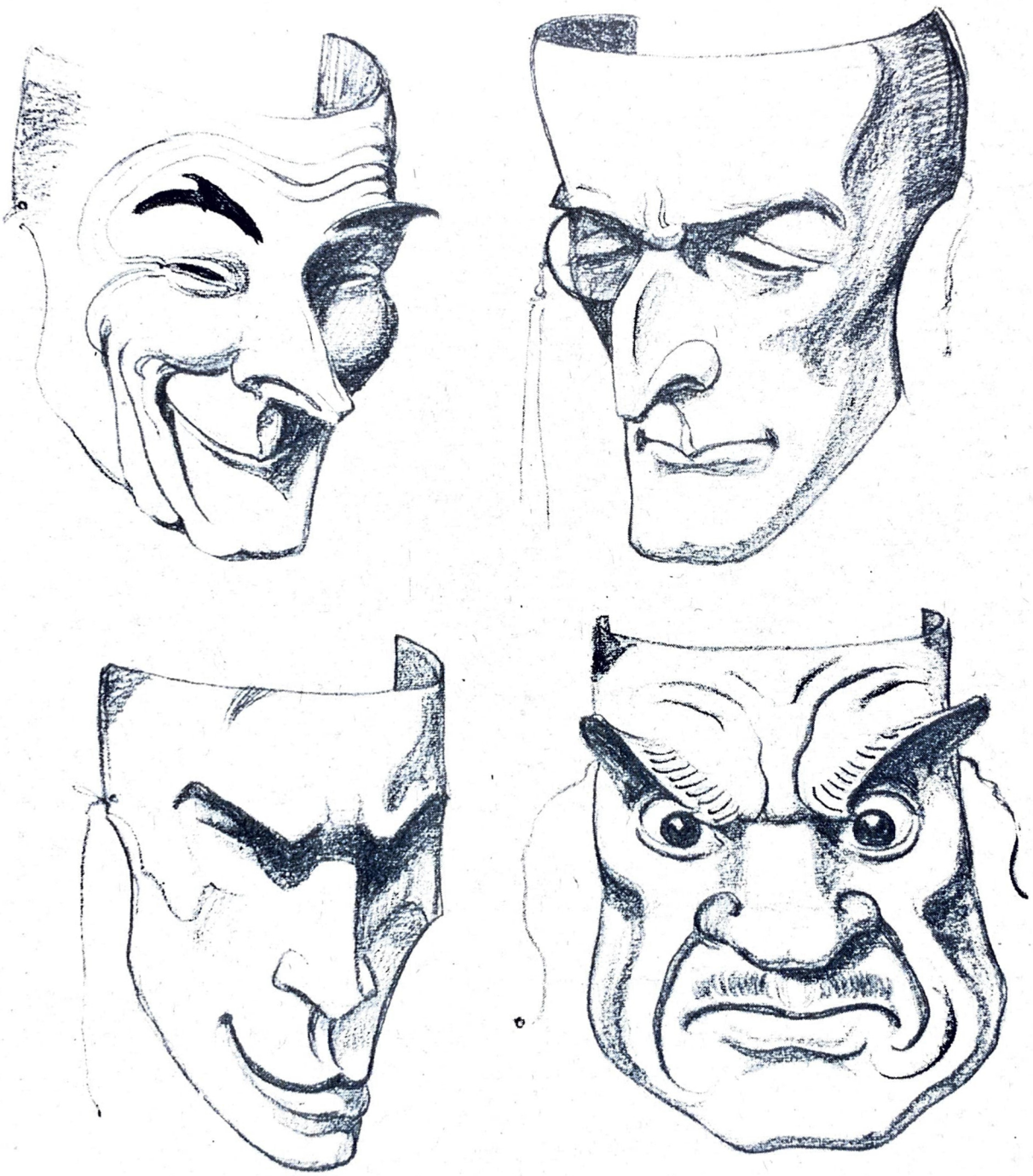
Many masks are based on exaggerated anatomical characteristics, as is demonstrated by these studies by the author.



Whatever one's motif or theme, the principles of rhythmic coordination must always be followed consistently.

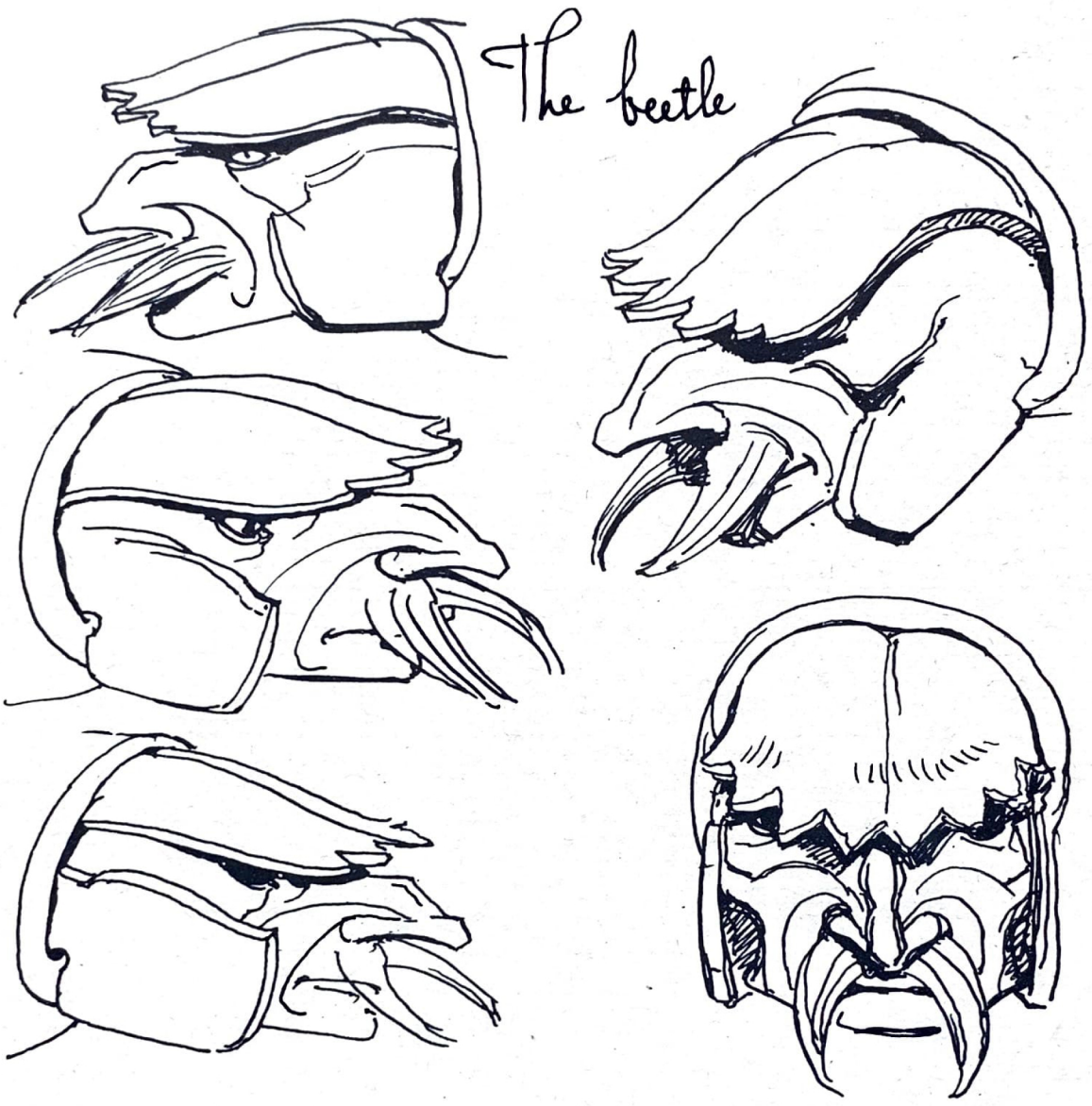
of the face has to be built in conformity with its characteristics; its lines must find support and balance in their rhythmic continuity through all parts of the face in order to achieve harmonious ensemble and semblance of life.

As another source of inspiration, the mask-maker may turn to the almost unlimited field of facial expressions, typifying various moods which play such an important part in masks, masking, and mask-making.



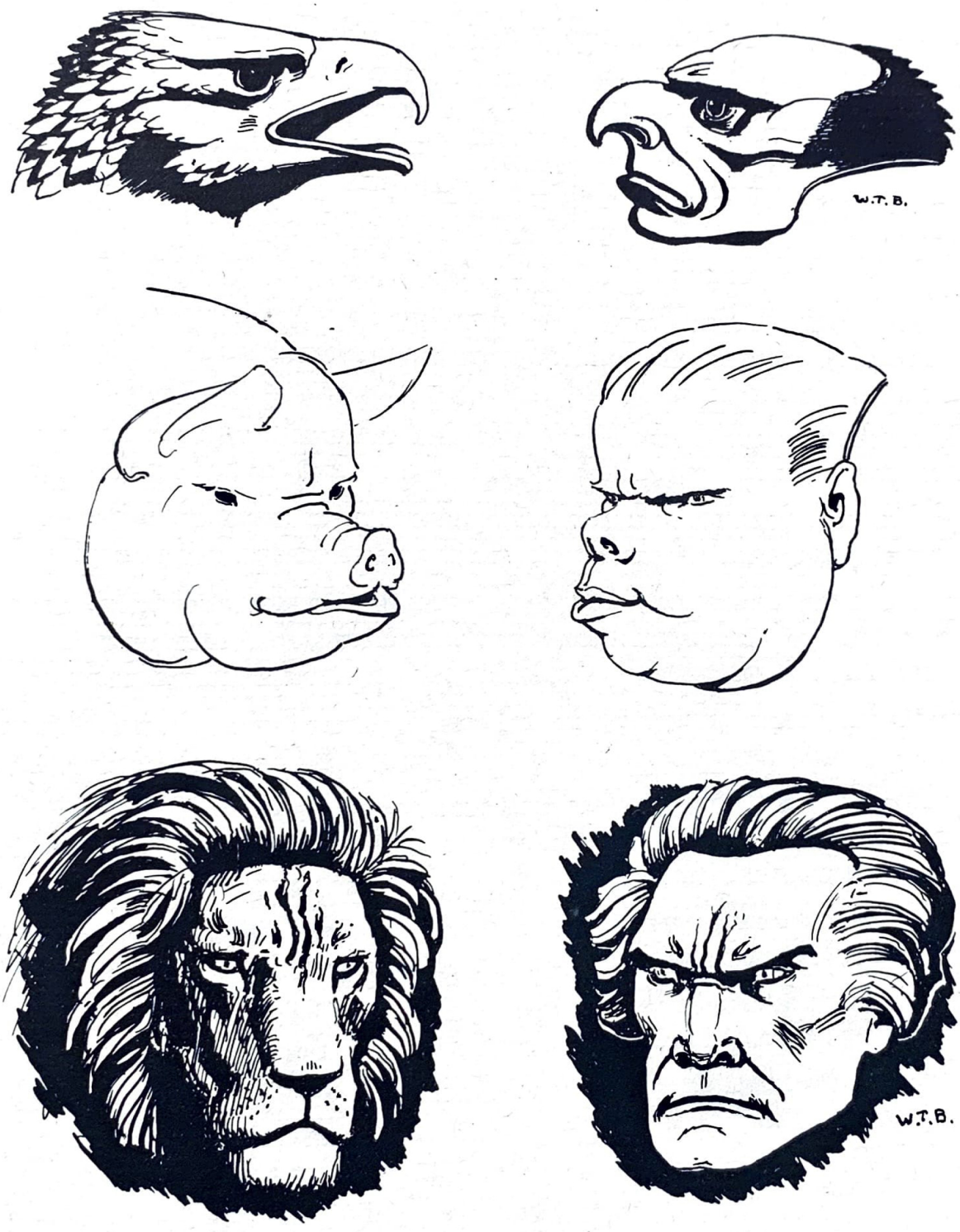
Sketches for masks suggested by observation and comparison of human faces. Dozens of sketches of a motif are often made in order to develop it properly.

A single feature—a certain peculiarity—may become the theme for a mask. The rest of the face must then be made to conform with this feature.



Still another type of theme may be derived from animal, bird, fish, or insect characteristics which, when embodied in a human face, produce an extraordinary intensity of character, as indicated by the accompanying sketches.

Then, finally, the mask-maker may base his themes on abstract ideas, suggesting allegorical and symbolic masks.



Birds and beasts offer a vast source of suggestion.

With this scope before him, the maker of masks must choose one subject at a time and concentrate on it. Since a complicated task lies ahead, involving various painstaking processes, he will not undertake it unless he conceives a really significant and novel idea, and then only after he has studied it from every angle and solved every technical problem.

Materials

Having a definite idea for a mask, one will naturally insist upon executing it with utmost precision. Consequently, he will be careful, in the first place, to choose a material of a quality that will permit expressing this idea with the highest degree of exactitude, and make possible the development of the finest details. It should be light but rigid and tough; it should not warp or shrink; and it should not break or split. A mask to be practical must be durable; it must be thin yet strong; it must be easily adjustable to the head and must have enough apertures to allow the wearer to breathe, to see, and to hear. All this can only be done with the right kind of material. Masks have been made of various materials, but wood was used most extensively at all times in all parts of the world, many beautiful masks having been made of it. Yet wood has two drawbacks: it is apt to split, and a mask made of it requires considerable thickness. Consequently, a mask designed to encase the wearer's head must be much larger than life size.

Many masks have been made of various metals such as copper, silver, or gold. These are durable materials, but metal masks are apt to dent if they are thin, and are too heavy for real use if they are thick.

Papier-maché, known popularly as the material of which masks are made, is used mostly for simple or trivial kinds of masks where precision of execution and durability do not count.

Ivory, bone, mother-of-pearl, abalone shell, and tortoise shell are also used in mask-making, but they serve only as accents or decoration.

On the opposite page I discuss my own favorite material.

How I Make My Masks

WHEN I STARTED to make masks, I found myself confronted with the problem of finding some material that would be free from the above-mentioned shortcomings and that would yield itself best to my conception.

After having experimented with various materials, I found that hard, unbleached paper, glued in tightly compressed layers, reinforced with stout and stiff brass wires, protected from atmospheric action by coats of impermeable varnishes, and painted with oil colors, is most satisfactory. I now use this for all my masks—see note page 50.

Discovering the right tools was another difficult problem which required similar experimentation—see page 42.

Then gradually, utilizing all this equipment, I developed a practical technic. My present method, the result of twenty odd years of experimentation, gives the desired results. But it has, I must confess, a serious drawback which I could not eliminate; it is slow, complicated, and involves, in certain of its processes, much painstaking drudgery. The method consists of gluing small pieces of paper in a number of layers, applying the paper as dry as possible to prevent subsequent shrinkage, and compressing these layers so tightly that they form a shell as tough as hard wood. The little pieces of paper are cut in such shapes as can follow, without being forced, the surfaces of those various convexities that constitute the modeling of the mask. Here we have to remember that paper can bend only along straight or curved lines, or it can be rolled

into cylinders and cylindroids, or in conical and conoidal shapes, but it cannot be bent, without forcing and wrinkling, into spheroidal convexities. If it is forced against its nature into such shapes while damp, it will have the tendency, as it dries, to unbend. For that reason, every spheroidal form must be composed of many narrow strips. These strips always must be glued on the convex forms and never into cavities or over the slightest depressions. But as every depression on the outside of the mask has a corresponding bulge on the reverse side, the paper strips must be applied there. This precaution is necessary because the paper used is always slightly damp from the moisture of the glue, and when applied across a concave surface, even if well pressed down, it will spring up when drying and thus impair the solidity of the mask.

The large general forms have to be built first.

When we come to such details as the eyes, the nostrils, or the lips, minute pieces of paper must be carefully cut in shapes that can follow these small forms, and here much patience is needed.

A mask constructed in this fashion should be from one-sixteenth to one-eighth of an inch thick. Its modeling at this stage is far from perfect, and it has to be improved by cutting, carving, and filing.

To verify that all the planes, curves, lines, and angles are as they should be, the mask has to be observed at every possible angle under the strong light of a single electric bulb; the sharp shadows of even the slightest protrusions help to detect every defect which has to be eliminated by more filing and cutting.

The next step is to give the mask an even thickness, and especially to eliminate weak spots which can easily be detected by holding the mask quite close against an electric lamp and looking into its hollow. The light penetrates the shell of the mask at the weak points, which have to be covered by additional layers of paper, applied on the inside surface.

The mask is then reinforced by stiff brass wire, which runs around the edge under the last four layers of paper. The wire used for this pur-

pose, commonly known as spring wire, should be about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter. It is difficult to bend, but once given the exact curves, it retains them permanently. It is attached to the edge of the mask by about two hundred and fifty small strips of glued paper, one and one-half inches long and half an inch wide, overlapping each other at intervals of one-sixteenth of an inch and glued half on the outside and half on the inside of the mask, tightly pulled over the wire. Other wire reinforcements, properly shaped, are inserted in all the protruding features, as in a prominent nose, chin, cheekbones, eyebrows, or beard.

The next step is to give the whole mask two or three coats of varnish on both outside and inside. When the varnish is dry, more cutting is needed to sharpen small nooks and ridges.

Finally, the mask is painted with oil colors; there will be three or four coats of paint, and again much cutting and improving the surface after each coat, before the final coat is applied.

This is my general scheme for making a paper mask, and all my masks are made according to it, observing the above-stated precautions, but they are constructed in four distinct ways, as follows:

1. By the direct method, where the mask is constructed from the very beginning without the help of a mold.
2. By pressing small sections of the proposed mask in a plaster of Paris mold and joining them by other layers of paper.
3. By building first a brass wire armature and using it as a frame for the paper walls of the mask.
4. By dividing the surface of the intended mask into definite planes, cutting out of Bristol board the shapes of these planes and joining them with strips of paper.

Each of these methods is applied in the making of a certain particular kind of mask.

1 — The Direct Method (See photographs pages 38-39)

The first — the direct method — is the most interesting to follow, but it is also the most difficult. I usually start by forming the horizontal curve of the forehead, from ear to ear and right above the eyebrows, out of several narrow strips of paper glued tightly together one upon another. When this is dry and firm, I add more and more paper strips, forming the rest of the forehead. Additional layers of paper strips, applied in different directions on its outer and inner surface, give sufficient firmness to retain its shape when dry.

The forehead thus formed can be used now as a base for building the frame of the face. This I do by attaching, to the temple ends of the forehead, narrow paper strips outlining the sides of the face just in front of the ears, down to the corners of the lower jaws and thence following the edges of the jaws until they meet at the bottom of the chin.

About fifteen layers of paper strips will form a firm frame of the face. To this I add the outline of the profile, made of very narrow strips attached to the middle of the eyebrow line and at the bottom of the chin. All this has to be made very firm and with the utmost precision, as the correct shape of the whole mask will depend on the accuracy of this framework.

The largest and simplest planes and curves of the face, as the cheeks, the jaws, the chin, and the sides of the nose, must then be constructed, leaving large orifices where subsequently the framing of the eyes, the nostrils, and the mouth, will have to be shaped out of very small bits of paper, cut in various patterns to follow the structural details of these parts. This is a painstaking proceeding, but not too difficult if every bit of paper is correctly and firmly fitted in its proper place. When the whole face is thus completed, the top of the head is built up of strips half an inch wide running transversely from ear to ear. That completes the whole shape of the mask.

The next step is the reinforcing of the mask with wire. With this in

view, the edges of the mask have to be trimmed and given the desired outline. Then a piece of stiff brass wire, about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter, has to be shaped to follow very exactly the edge of the mask, all around, starting from the top of the head, going under the chin, and returning to the top. The wire is then attached to the edge by little pieces of paper, one inch long and half an inch wide, which are glued on the outside and inside surfaces of the mask, binding the wire tightly to that edge. These little papers overlap each other at intervals of approximately one-sixteenth of an inch.

At this stage, the mask is quite firm and has the desired proportions, but its features are still far from being satisfactory. Its modeling has now to be perfected by cutting down with a razor blade all the unwanted protrusions and by building up the surface wherever necessary to attain the desired form. If the depressions, such as those around the eyes, have to be deepened, carving gouges and curved scalpels should be used. There will also be much cutting necessary around the mouth and the nostrils.

To give the mask satisfactory firmness and durability, additional layers of paper must be glued on the inside surface until uniform thickness of about one-sixteenth of an inch is attained; this means about twenty-five layers of paper.

The next process is the varnishing of the mask, on the outside and inside. This is done by applying several thin coats of Valspar or shellac, letting each coat dry thoroughly before the next one is put on. Since this is done chiefly to protect the paper from moisture, which could cause warping or ungluing of the mask, and from the disintegration caused by atmospheric influences, precaution must be taken that not even the smallest spot on the surface of the mask is left uncovered by the varnish.

The mask is now ready to be painted. The most permanent oil colors must be chosen and applied in several thin coats, allowing time for thorough drying of every coat. The first painting does not cover entirely the brown color of the mask, but the second does and gives the desired

full color. Yet this is not the final painting, because now all sorts of defects of the surface can be detected which were not seen before the painting. They have to be eliminated by scraping or shaving off, which leaves the mask dotted with brown spots. It will take two or three new coats of paint to achieve the final desired effect.

Gilding the Inside of a Mask

It remains now to take care of the inside of the mask. I cover it with gold leaf, as this is the most durable finish; it is easy to keep clean and is free from substances that could be injurious to the face of the wearer.

When I am about to gild the inside of a mask, I put out the cat, and, as politely as possible, persuade everybody to leave the studio. Then I shut all windows and lock the doors, for gold leaf is so delicate, so flimsy, that even the slightest suspicion of a breeze can carry it away or crumple it to nothingness. I hold my breath and refrain from touching it with my fingers to avoid destroying the costly material.

There are two modern methods of attaching the gold leaf to a surface: the water-gilding and the oil-gilding. I have adopted the latter, but with certain modifications which adjust it to my specific purpose.

The oil-gilding process is as follows:

First, the inner surface of the mask must be carefully prepared — it must be hard and smooth. To achieve this, the last layer of paper is glued down with particular care to avoid ridges and other irregularities. This firm and smooth paper surface is given two or three coats of orange shellac. When the shellac has hardened, it is covered with a coat of mandarin-red enamel. This is a divergence from the orthodox oil-gilding method, where gesso is used as the ground for the gold. (Gesso would not be practical for the inside of a mask.) When the enamel is thoroughly dry, its smooth and glossy surface is ready to be gilded.

As adhesive (or mordant, as the gilders call it), I use Japan lac, an

oily, viscous substance, quick-setting and durable. To assure myself that it is thinly and evenly spread in every part of the enameled surface, I rub it in with my fingers.

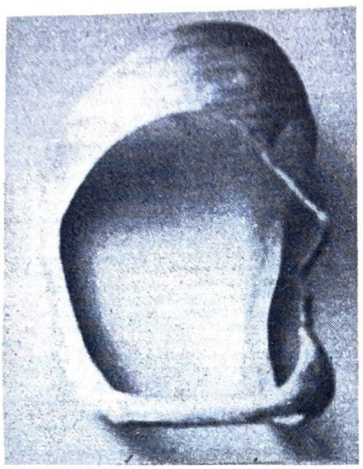
The gold leaf must not under any circumstances be put on wet mordant; that would destroy it. In a few minutes, the Japan lac is nearly solidified, still retaining just enough viscosity and adhesive quality. When it sings or, rather, squeaks under the finger drawn gently over its surface, that is the moment to begin laying the gold leaf. No time should be lost, as in a few more minutes the mordant will harden, losing all its adhesiveness. Therefore, a book of gold leaf must be held in readiness, and some of its leaves cut into convenient strips.

A gilder of frames and other objects places his leaves on a little cushion stuffed with cotton and covered with chamois skin, and cuts them with a straight knife. Then he picks up the strips with the "gilder's tip" (a flat camel-hair brush) to transfer them to the mordant-covered surface. This, however, is not practical when the hollow of a mask is to be gilded; one would require at least three hands. I therefore hold each leaf in-between two tissues that separate the leaves in the book and cut it with sharp scissors, usually in half, or, if necessary, into narrower strips. Then, after having removed the top paper, I turn the other with the gold strip upside down and quickly place it on the adhesive surface, gently pressing down the gold through the paper strip, which is then taken away.

When the whole surface is thus covered with the gold strips (which should slightly overlap each other, rather than leave red interstices), a soft camel-hair brush will flatten down the gold, remove the loose edges, and sweep the gold particles into any little accidental spaces that remain uncovered.

After that, the gilded surface must not be touched for at least twenty-four hours, in which time it will dry thoroughly. Then a rub with a chamois skin will clean it of all the remaining loose particles and thus

1



The forehead is constructed first; then the profile outline is formed of several layers of narrow strips. The outline of the jaws completes the frame, which must be rigid.

2

With the frame completed, the cheeks, the chin, and the sides of the nose are gradually built up. (The thickness of the paper used in this mask was 72.50 microns.)

3

The framing of the eyes and the nostrils is next constructed of numerous very small pieces of paper, each carefully glued in place.

4

The lips are now formed. This completes the shape of the face, which has an average thickness of 1/16" (about 25 layers of paper).

METHOD I—THE DIRECT METHOD

For further description, see page 34.

5

The features of the mask are next corrected by painstaking cutting, filing and patching. This portion of the work requires the utmost patience; it cannot be hurried.

6

When the top and sides of the head have been added, the mask receives a temporary painting in tempera, to realize the effect and to reveal the imperfections.

7

By further filing, scraping, cutting, and patching, the form is completed. It receives the reinforcing brass wire edges and a coat of shellac.

8

The finished mask. The final coat of oil colors was rubbed in with the fingers. When dry, its surface was smoothed and polished by rubbing.

DIRECT METHOD, CONTINUED

All photographs are from the same mask.

finish the gilding process. It is not necessary to burnish the gold in the mask with agate burnishers, as is done in other types of work, as the underlying glossy surface of the enamel contributes just enough brilliancy.

2 — Method Using a Mold

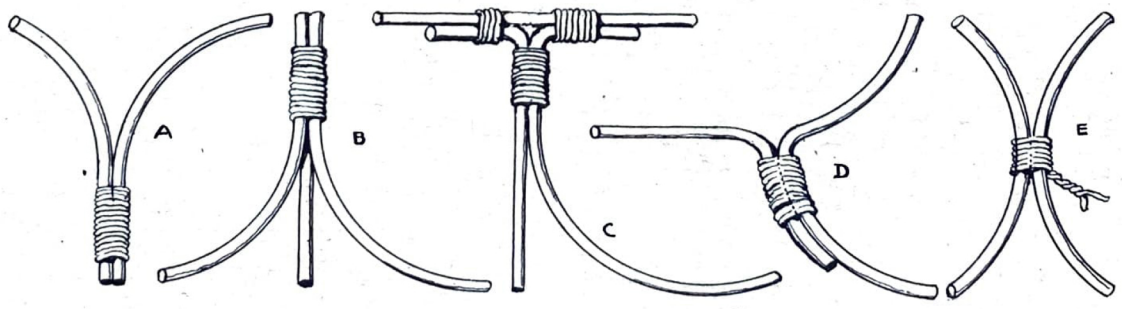
My second method of making a mask is with the help of a plaster of Paris mold, which is taken from a clay or plasteline model carefully finished for that purpose.

It would be impossible to make a good mask by simply pressing glued paper in a mold, because the paper, no matter how little dampness it might have absorbed from the glue, would shrink considerably when drying and, in shrinking, it would distort the features of the mask; this would also make the mask smaller than was intended. Therefore, I divide the face of the proposed mask into small sections. Each well defined section is pressed against the corresponding section of the mold. When all these sections are dry and hold their shapes, they are assembled and joined by little pieces of paper, leaving narrow interstices as adjustment for the shrinkage of the sections. The whole is then put again into the mold to verify that they correspond.

The rest of the processes are the same as in the first method.

3 — Wire Armature Method

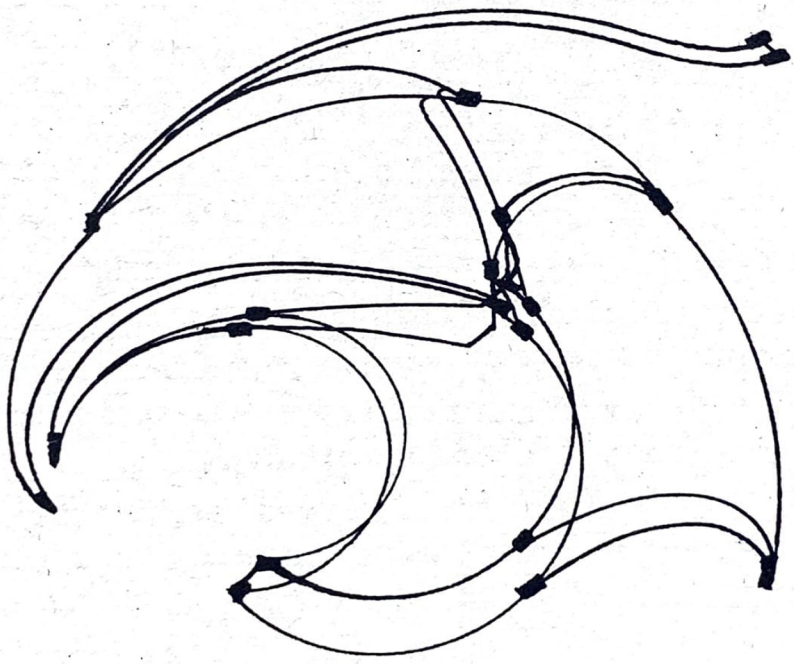
The third procedure can be applied only in the making of large, fantastic masks of more or less geometrical design. In this case, I start by



making a wire armature or frame. Having chosen a number of the most constructive lines in the design of the mask, I bend pieces of stiff brass wire into the curves of these lines. All these pieces of wire are then joined, mostly by their ends, to form the frame. At the junctions they are tightly bound with very thin copper wire, or soldered.

On this frame the paper mask is shaped. The wires remain in the walls of the mask.

The finishing processes are the same as in the preceding cases.



Wire armature for "Bird of Prey" mask, page 93.

4 — Cardboard Method

A mask whose surface consists of a number of clearly defined planes can be built by following the fourth of my schemes, which introduces cardboard in the construction.

Each plane of such a mask is carefully designed and its shape cut out of cardboard; then all these variously shaped pieces are joined by strips

of paper. The whole is then covered with several layers of paper on the outside and inside.

The finishing processes are the same as in the previous cases.

Pattern for cut-out parts for a mask made of cardboard.

Durability

A mask carefully constructed in any of these ways is very durable. I have masks now twenty odd years old, which, after having been used on the stage for several seasons, and having endured much packing and unpacking, are still in perfect condition; in fact, they do not show the slightest sign of deterioration. To assure myself that it is so, I have made incisions into several of my older masks and found the material as sound as if it had been made yesterday. As they are painted with none but the most permanent oil colors, their surface is as durable as that of oil paintings, and they can be cleaned in much the same way as such paintings.

Tools

Since there are no special tools for mask-making, one has to look for them among the multitude of those used in various arts, trades, and professions. After long searching and trying, I succeeded in assembling a set

that best answers my purpose. It is composed of wood carving tools, surgeons' scalpels, jewelers' burrs, silversmiths' files, shoemakers' knives, razor blades, penknives, scissors (long and short, straight and curved), a set of small clamps, calipers (both exterior and interior), as well as a box of pliers, tweezers, and nippers of every kind and description.

Among the wood carving tools, the gouges of various curves are best for cutting into cavities. The scalpels are excellent for cutting the surfaces or making sharp incisions; they are made of the best steel and come in a great variety of shapes. Of the surgical scissors, I prefer those with long rods, ending with curved blades. One could think they were made especially for cutting on the inside of the mask. The curved shoemakers' knife answers the same purpose. The hand-made silversmiths' files are of every shape and curve. Punches, burnishers, and awls complete the outfit.

"Silent Masks"

My masks are made for use in pantomime and dance, but not for the spoken drama. They may be called, for want of a better expression, "silent masks." This kind of mask would muffle the speech, while speech would destroy the effect and mystery of the mask. Of course, the Greek actors did speak through their masks, but these were made especially for that purpose; they were all far from being realistic, but so was the actor's speech, which was a rhythmic recitation or chant. Thus the two artificialities harmonized well.

Types of Masks

With the exception of the portrait masks of Abraham Lincoln (page 113) and Ignace Jan Paderewski (page 112), none of my masks are portraits of any persons. Nor are they, with rare exceptions, caricatures of individuals. They are either simplified and intensified synthetic representations of various generic human types or their moods, some more or less realistic, others stylized in varying degrees; or else they are imaginary, fantastic, or grotesque. There are also some humorous or comedy

masks. All of them may be divided into three categories: the human type masks, the fantastic or grotesque, and the comic.

(The Katharine Hepburn mask, page 94, can hardly be called a portrait, in the strict sense of the word. It is, rather, my impression—a somewhat free interpretation—of the actress's features as she appeared made up for a Chinese part.)

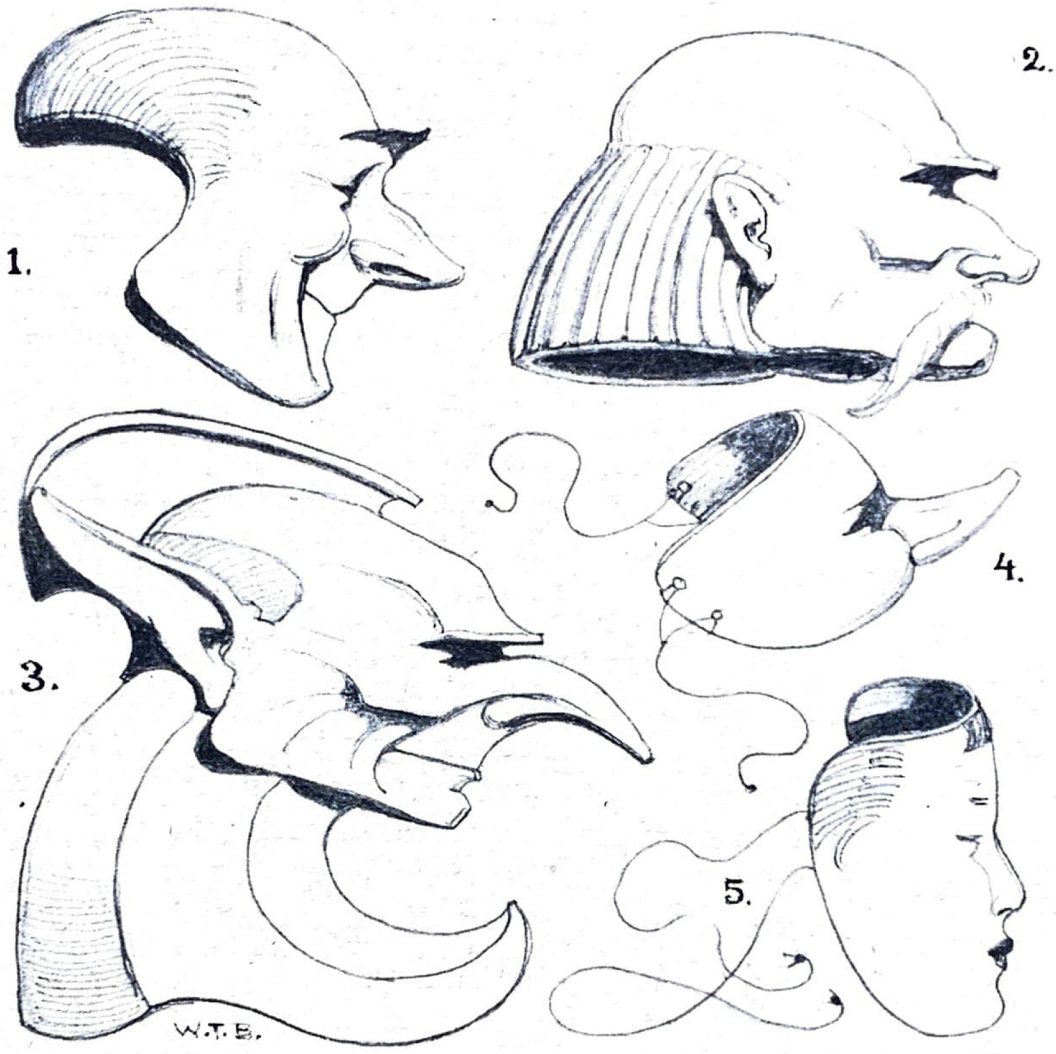
Various Ways of Fitting

Masks may cover more or less of their wearer's head, and so classified, there are five kinds:

1. The three-quarter masks, which extend over the top of the head and cover the ears; they provide a more complete disguise and can be quickly adjusted to the head without the necessity of strings. Most of my masks are of this type.
2. The full masks that encase the entire head.
3. The high masks. This group comprises fantastic and grotesque masks provided with a neck into which the head fits while the head of the mask is above the wearer's head.
4. The half-masks, covering only the upper part of the face, from hairline down to the upper lip, leaving the mouth and lower jaw free so that the masker can talk; they are held in place by strings.
5. The shallow masks, covering the entire face from ear to ear and from hairline down to just under the chin, like the Japanese "No" masks; they also depend on strings over the ears.

Practical Considerations

A mask must be practical and comfortable. In the first place, the eye apertures should be so placed that the masker can see at least twelve feet of the floor before him. If the type of the mask requires that its eyes are



VARIOUS ADJUSTMENTS OF MASKS

1. *Three-quarters mask; adjustable without strings.*
2. *Head mask; covers the whole head of the wearer.*
3. *High mask; wearer's head fits into the mask's neck.*
4. *Half mask; covers only upper part of wearer's face.*
5. *Face mask; covers face only to ears—has no top.*

above or below those of the wearer, there should be provided other small holes for vision. As the masker gets most of his breathing air through the nostrils and eyes of the mask, these apertures should be wide enough to admit it. The mask must not press so tightly against the ears as to interfere with the hearing.

All this I learned when, in the early days of my adventure with masks, I had adjusted my masks on the heads of eight pretty maidens on the stage at a rehearsal of the Greenwich Village Follies. They stood there in a row as I had left them, afraid to move, as if they were paralyzed. The orchestra was waiting; the rehearsal had to go on; the director threw up his hands in despair. I went to see what was the matter and, passing along the unhappy row, I asked the girls, one by one, if the masks were comfortable — or, rather, if they were comfortable in the masks. And, putting my left ear to each mask, I heard distressed, muffled answers: "I can't hear!" "I can't breathe!" "I can't see!" Whenever I am finishing a mask, this unhappy row stands before my eyes.

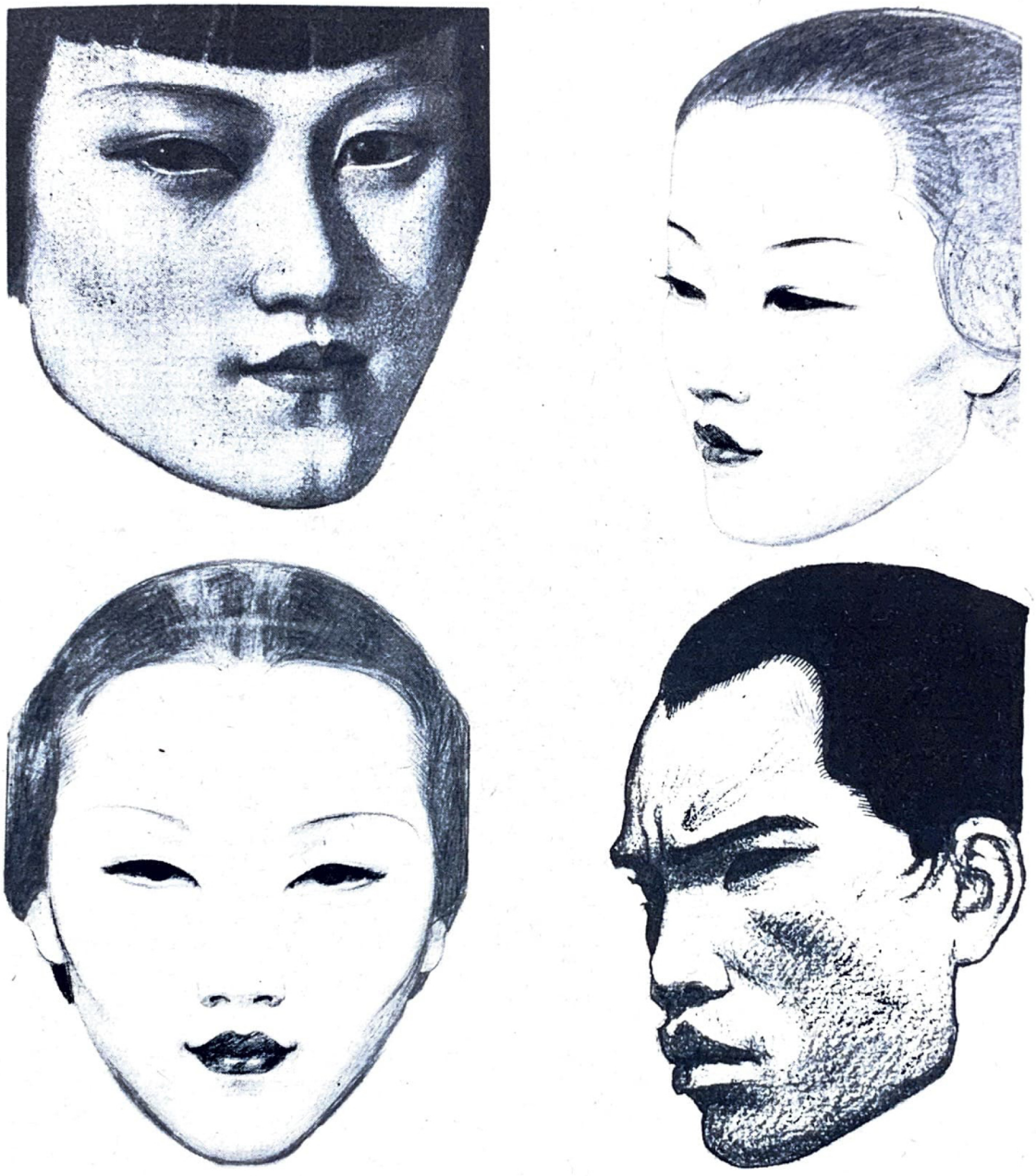
Sizes and Proportions of Human Heads

To make a mask properly adjustable to most heads, it is necessary to know the average size of the human head. With this in view, I have taken measurements of many heads of men and women of the white race and have come to the conclusion that the following are average:

	Men	*Women*
From eyebrows to tip of chin	6″	5⅛″
From apex of occiput to tip of chin	10¾″	9¾″
Width through temples	6¾″	5¾″
Width of jaws	5⅞″	4¾″

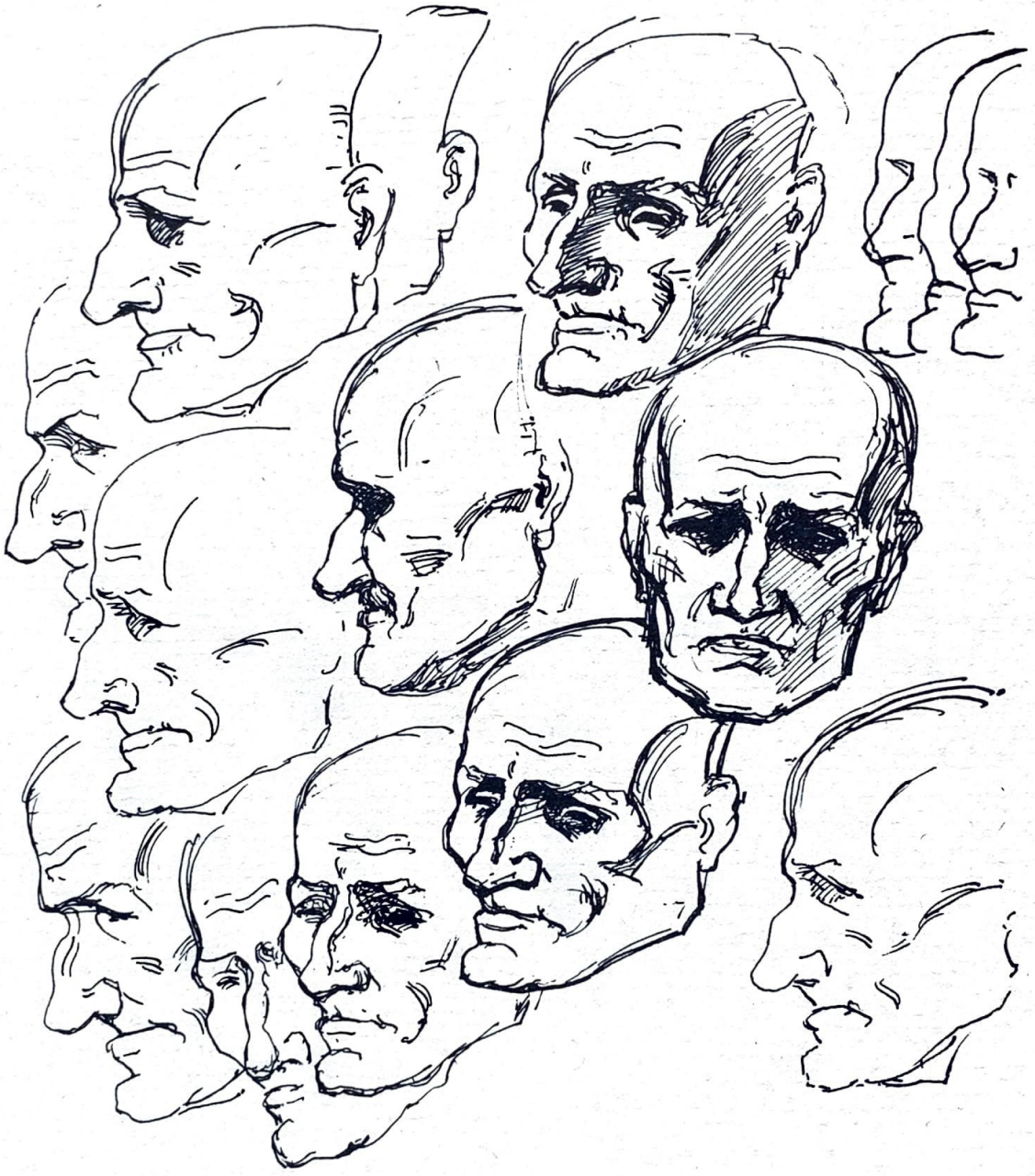
Racial Characteristics

The proportions of Chinese and Japanese heads — in fact, those of all the Yellow Race — are very different from the above. In the first



PRELIMINARY STUDIES FROM NATURE

Before he plans any particular mask, the designer makes many such sketches as general studies of a race. They may be in any desired medium.



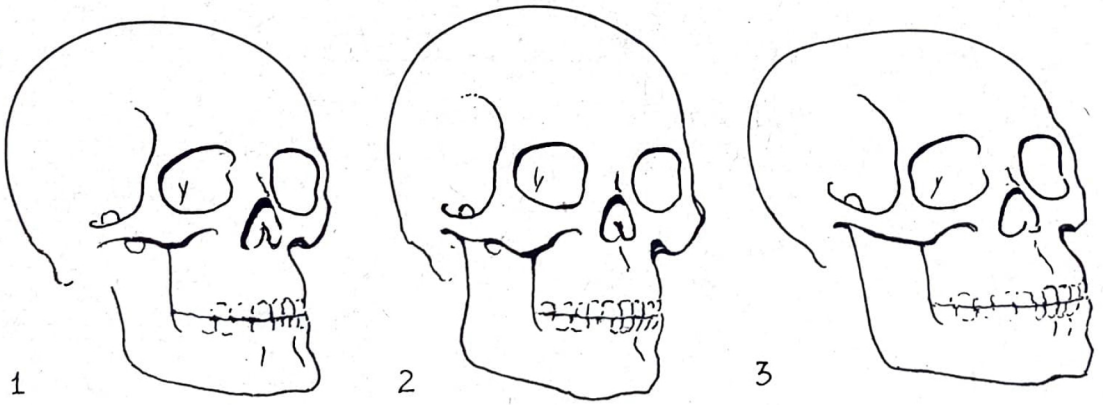
PRELIMINARY STUDIES OF A TYPE

Before making a mask, the type selected as inspiration is sketched again and again from every angle in order to gain full familiarity with its peculiarities.

place, these heads are much wider in relation to their depth; they give us the impression of being compressed from back to front. (Our heads must look to the flat-faced Mongolian as if they were squeezed laterally. The sharp profile of a white man with its protruding nose must remind him of that of a bird. A Japanese once cringingly confessed to me that they call white men "tangu," which is the name of one of their "No" masks representing a demon with an absurdly protruding nose.)

Our actors, made up as Chinese, never look the part, but it is not their fault; they cannot change the structure of their faces. No amount of paint could ever make a greyhound look like a Pekingese.

The typical almond-shaped eyes of the Mongolian are not the chief and independent characteristic of the race. They are merely the result of the bone formation, of the prominence of the cheek bones and the slight elevation of the nasal bone, which cause a certain peculiar pulling and stretching of the skin around the eyes—the so-called "Mongolian fold" — giving them their slanting appearance.



COMPARATIVE HUMAN SKULLS

1. *Dolichocephalic Orthognathic type—White Race.*
2. *Hypsibrachycephalic, Orthognathic type—Mongolian, Malayan, American Indian.*
3. *Dolichocephalic Prognathic Negroid type*

This is but an example of the general principle on which human faces of all races and individual types are built. There exist a structural unity and interdependence of all parts of the face, where one feature influences the forms of those around it, while all of them are primarily the outcome of the bone structure, which controls the disposition of the muscles and stretches the skin accordingly. There is rhythm and harmony in a human face and we must strive to emphasize this rhythm and harmony in our masks, as one incongruous feature may disturb the whole.

The discovering and defining of structural differences among faces of various racial groups and individual types is, or should be, of stirring interest to a maker of masks. Whenever he finds an opportunity to see a particularly typical Chinese, Indian, Negro, or South Sea Islander, he will study his physiognomy persistently and with intense concentration, comparing it with other types and making deductions from the results of these observations, supported by his knowledge of anatomy and by his previous findings.

If he finds the convolutions of the Negro's ear different from all others, he will observe that ear until its owner squirms. If the construction of the slanting Mongolian eye intrigues him, he may persuade a Chinese (without embarrassing the man too much) to demonstrate how his eyelids work when he looks down or up or to one side.

Note: *In closing this chapter, let me stress that the method of mask-making above described is solely my own—one which I invented and developed for my personal use. While it is well-suited to my purpose, temperament, and way of doing things, I by no means claim that it is the only good method. If there is another as good or better, however, it has not been my good fortune to learn of it.*

CHAPTER V

Circumstances

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK me how I conceived the idea of making masks, a question usually dismissed by saying that the prospect of going to a masquerade prompted me to make a mask for myself, and that the interest shown in this spurred me into making other masks. This is true, but it really does not answer the question, for although an idea seems to come like a flash from nowhere, there are all sorts of circumstances, impressions, and suggestions that lead to vague, subconscious gropings which need but the igniting spark of a decisive impulse to flash into full-fledged conception.

Since my early boyhood days, to the annoyance of everyone around me, I have always tinkered, whittled or glued paper into shapes of toys, puppets, and diminutive towns. This persistent habit of making things, with the subsequent help of technological and art studies, was bound to develop some aptitude for such work as the making of masks; while growing up in a family of actors, where all things connected with the artificialities of the stage were the daily topics of discussion, would sooner or later suggest the idea of a thing as theatrical as is the mask.

So the potentialities were there; going to a masquerade in 1914, just before the outbreak of the last war, furnished the decisive incentive, and I made my first mask. It was hastily constructed of pieces of cardboard and paper and represented, in a limited number of planes and angles, the grim face of a demon. It was flimsy and full of imperfections, but the impression it created at the dance astonished me. It was acclaimed

as something new. With this encouragement, I set to work improving my mask, reinforcing it, giving its features more definition, adorning it with a headgear of scrolls and convolutions and painting in blue and green tempera. The final result is pictured on page 97.

My second mask, made in the same year, in direct contrast to the stylized "Blue Demon," was a painfully realistic imitation of a feminine type with real hair and painstakingly elaborated complexion. See Chapter VIII. Scruples about the total neglect of such principles as those concerning the unity of material or elimination of the unessential did not trouble me in this case in the least for, frankly, my object was to create deception whereby I could amuse myself by making my friends believe they were seeing a living face.

Thereafter, I began to treat the making of masks more seriously as an art, striving toward the achievement of more and more simplicity, impressiveness, vigor, and rhythmic coordination. At first the work was discouragingly difficult, full of snags and mishaps, with always new problems to solve.

However, in 1918, I had twelve masks hanging on the studio wall. Until then mask-making, as well as acting in masks, was purely my favorite hobby.

I started making masks in utter ignorance of what had previously been done, and of what was currently going on, in this very ancient art. At that time I had not seen any of those fascinating masks which the natives of many parts of the world were making, nor had it ever occurred to me to suspect that anything of the sort could exist; and it was just as well that it was so, for this very ignorance of mine gave me a perfect freedom from outside influences and permitted me, or rather forced me, to develop my own style and technic from the very foundation. We know how much a novice in any art can be swayed this way or that way by the forceful impressions he gets from superior examples of this or that style, and how long it takes him after that to find himself.

It was only much later that I got acquainted with the amazing variety of masks of all lands and of all times. This fascinated and overwhelmed me. At the same time, I could see how much there was to learn and where I stood with my masks. Yet by that time my ideas on the subject were sufficiently set to guard me from being swayed from the direction I had taken at the start. I could look critically at the achievements of others.

From all this infinite variety of conceptions, styles, and technics—from all the great bulk of evidence of imagination and skill that achieved such vigor and impressiveness in so many different ways—I learned that it is toward this vigor and impressiveness in one's own style that it is really worth while to strive.

There is a vast difference between the circumstances under which the primitive and the semi-civilized natives of various lands have made their masks and those with which a modern maker has to cope. Primitive peoples even today work along the lines of established traditions, which, in their slow growth through ages, developed not only their styles, but also individual standard types of masks having certain well defined characteristics which are repeated with only slight variation. This constant repetition of a mask of a certain type, from generation to generation, led to gradual perfecting of the type, often resulting in high esthetic value of a native mask.

The modern maker of masks, on the other hand, has the freedom, and also the necessity, to create his own style and his own types; he is not ruled by any such traditions, since the use of masks and the art of making them have long ago lost their significance and have been forgotten among the people of our western civilization. The mask-maker of today is reviving something that had died out. He has all the privileges and all the struggles of a pioneer. He will naturally be affected by the general trend in art of his times, but as to his specific art, he has carte blanche with all the advantages and disadvantages of independence.

In 1918, two of my masks were shown for the first time at the Annual Exhibition of the New York Architectural League where, due to the enthusiastic appreciation of Howard Greenley and some other members of the hanging committee, they were given a prominent place.

That same winter my masks had their first trial when members of the Comedy Club enacted an effective mask-pantomime in the private theatre at the estate of Mr. Charles C. Goodrich, in Llewellyn Park, N. J., before a small but appreciative audience of invited guests.

But the masks did not become known to the large public till in 1920 they were "discovered," when Frank Crowninshield, whose friendship I cherish, saw them in my Gramercy Park studio, and at once decided to have them published in *Vanity Fair,* of which he was the editor. He had the masks photographed and they appeared in several consecutive issues of that publication. Other magazines and newspapers, in America and abroad, followed his lead.

Meanwhile, he introduced my masks to the Coffee House Club, where a group of the members acted with them in a fantastic pantomime conceived by John J. Chapman and in which Margaret Severn, a talented terpsichorean, interpreted them very successfully in improvised dances. Theatrical producers and stage directors were the audience. As a result, John Murray Anderson made an arrangement with me for four masks and engaged Margaret Severn to dance with them in the "Greenwich Village Follies." That same season I signed a contract with C. B. Cochran, of London, for a second set of masks. Grace Christie, another American dancer, wore them for several seasons in her exquisite interpretation at the London Alhambra.

After that, my masks found their way into other productions, and they became known as "Benda Masks."

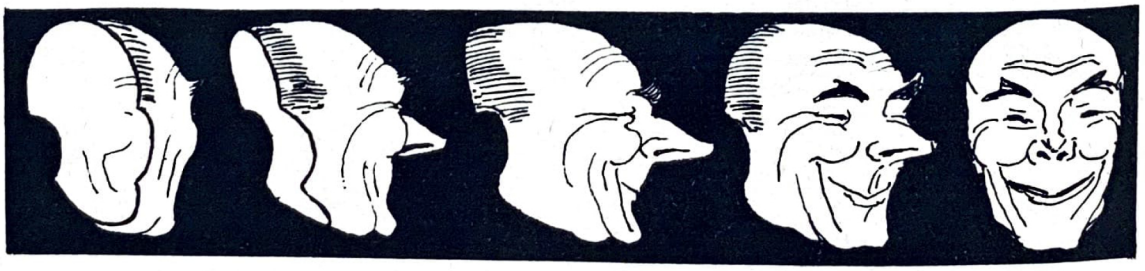
Seeing my masks on the stage for the first time, I found that the fine details and delicate tints, intended for close observation, did not mean much to the spectators in the back rows; that the carrying qualities

GROTESQUE MASKS BY W. T. BENDA

Here we see a group of Benda masks combined into a dramatic composition. Benda's skill in producing such decorations is too well known to need comment.

had to be improved by more vigorous modeling, bolder characterization, intensified color contrasts, and stronger accents. In a large theatre, the mask on the stage, like the face of the actor, must receive especially intense make-up, and the larger the auditorium, the bolder should be the exaggeration.

In a house as large as the Radio City Music Hall of New York, it is only the extreme exaggeration of fantastic, bizarre, and caricature masks that really counts. Extravagance of form and color there finds its proper place.



CHAPTER VI

Masks and the Theatre

AT THE TIME my masks found their place in connection with the dance, I learned with a thrill that the idea of reviving the use of masks in drama had just begun to germinate in Europe. Edward Gordon Craig was the first enthusiastic promoter of this idea. In his book, *The Theatre Advancing,* published in London in 1912, expounding his bold thoughts of what the theatre of the future should be, he insists on the importance and value of the mask in drama. In his enthusiasm, he calls the mask "that paramount means of dramatic expression without which acting was bound to degenerate."

The idea was spreading in Europe and soon in America. Attempts were made to put it into execution, but they were timid and ineffective. The great idea was badly misunderstood. The general misconception was obvious when in dramas, realistic in various degrees, some of the characters in the play were given masks to wear (but only incidentally and always with some special excuse), while others were made to act barefaced. This incongruous combination resulted in most disturbing effects, for masks and living faces in juxtaposition clash and kill each other. Moreover, a mask—as I feel should be emphasized again—is an artificial thing; it is conventionalized; it has style; it is unreal; and for these reasons it is utterly incompatible with a more or less realistic drama. The acting with masks must be as unreal, as artificial, as stylized as the masks themselves. It should be entirely different from all other acting. Its prerequisite condition is poise; its movements should be rhythmic,

stylized and expressive, they must be limited to the few most significant ones; nonessential motions must scrupulously be eliminated. The rigid immobility of the mask requires that the acting be much slower than natural movements. This kind of acting is, of course, frankly artificial and extremely theatrical, but this is exactly how it should be. After all, on the stage everything should be theatrical. Those who find that anything is too theatrical in the theatre may as well tell us that a lion is too leonine, an angel too angelic, or water too wet. The only right place for masks in the theatre is in an especially conceived mask drama where all the personae wear masks, where the whole *mise-en-scène,* the costumes, the acting, are as frankly artificial as are the masks and have the same degree of significance, exaggeration, simplification, and style. This has to be a silent drama, for the incompatibility of masks and speech, especially natural speech, is obvious. The mask muffles the speech and the speech destroys the effect and the mystery of the mask.

A silent drama with masks is a mask pantomime. Now any mention of a pantomime or, still worse, a mask pantomime, seems to disturb a serious theatrical producer, either here or in England. It gives him ghastly visions of something quite trivial and at the same time too strange to be popular and lucrative. He has grave doubts whether pantomime could ever attain a high place in the theatre. It seems to be generally but erroneously agreed that the popularity of the pantomime in most of the Latin countries does not prove anything to us, for our public, not having been trained for that sort of entertainment, would never care to sit all evening watching a play without words. But fortunately, this is not so. Whenever a really good pantomime has been given in New York, it has had remarkable success. Such was "Sumurun," which was played to full houses for several seasons; and there were others, although few and far apart.

Let us then hope that some inspired dramatist and composer will soon come forth with a great pantomime written especially for masks,

and that a bold and farsighted producer will put it on the stage. There is no doubt that others would follow, and masks would assert themselves in the theatre.

Meanwhile, let them continue to hold their place in interpretative dancing and the three-minute pantomimes; let them decorate the walls of clubs and homes; or let them look pretty at the art exhibitions, till Melpomene and Thalia, remembering their successes with masks in the antiquity and Middle Ages, decide to follow the example of Terpsichora and revive masking in their lines.

Perhaps I should not close this chapter without brief reference to a somewhat unique use of masks in connection with the stage or screen—an indirect use, to be sure, but one not wholly lacking in interest. I refer to the employment of masks for promotional purposes. Such masks as a rule portray, with more or less glorification, the stars as made up for their parts in the advertised performance. These masks are made available for advance publicity by photographing them in various positions, against effective backgrounds suggestive of the *mise en scène* of the play, then reproducing these photographs on posters, and in pamphlets and magazines. Color photography, of course, is here most effective. My Katharine Hepburn mask, page 94, is of this type.

STUDIES BY BENDA FOR A MASK

Sketch after sketch helps to crystallize the basic idea.

CHAPTER VII

Experiences of a Mask-maker

MASK-MAKING in our times and among civilized people appears to be a bewilderingly odd occupation, a perplexing anachronism. One who undertakes it seems to puzzle his fellowmen in a peculiar manner; he is apt to be taken for some sort of an uncanny wizard, or a queer fish, at any rate. Consequently, strange things will happen to him; extraordinary experiences, some amusing, some vexing, will diversify his days. He will meet curious people and hear their fantastic propositions; he will be asked to do the impossible. When it becomes known that he makes masks, the strangest assortment of visitors will haunt his studio; grave tragedians, whimsical vaudeville comedians, ballet dancers, circus managers, manufacturers of mannequins and puppets, psychologists, magicians, and all kinds of schemers will come with their unique ideas, some interesting and clever, some incredibly eccentric or downright silly. He must not be too much astonished if some day he is asked to make a mask that could, at its wearer's will, change from one character to another, from one of a beautiful maiden to that of a terrifying beast; or a mask that at times becomes transparent, revealing the actor's own features; or else a mask that could not be distinguished from a living face even by touch. He must not be excessively vexed if one night, when stepping out of a car with one of his more realistic masks under his arm, he is stopped by a brass-buttoned representative of the law under the suspicion of having cut off somebody's head.

I have found much amusement in surprising and puzzling my

friends with my masks. It is a goodly pastime to ring your neighbor's doorbell, with some new mask on, and see him at a ludicrous nonplus when he opens the door.

But some such pranks do not work so well or, rather, work too well altogether. One summer night, I barely escaped being clubbed, and perhaps killed, when seeking diversion by appearing from behind bushes in a monstrous ape mask, with the intention of surprising a group of friends picnicking around a bonfire. While the appearance of the monster threw the feminine side of the company into panic, three brave men armed with clubs picked from the woodpile advanced toward me with grim determination and ugly threats. I saw then that this was the time to unmask without delay.

I have not yet met any people, old or young, simple or cultured, serious or frivolous, artists or laymen, who are not keenly interested in masks if they have the opportunity to get acquainted with them. They may be impressed in various ways; some of them seeing masks in action may derive purely esthetic satisfaction. To others, masks give peculiar thrills which they are unable to explain even to themselves. Still others, with super-sensitive nerves, either fall in ecstasy or are frightened out of their wits; but none of them can remain indifferent.

My "Pestilence" (see page 83) is a gruesome mask made with the purpose of frightening, or at least of giving a shudder. Inadvertently, I risked showing it to a lady with exceedingly sensitive nerves. She shrieked, drew back, and, covering her face with both hands, exclaimed, "Where *did* you ever get such a horrible idea!" When I informed her that the idea originated in my poor head, that for many weeks I nursed it there, cherished it and dreamed of it, seeking to perfect it till finally it was ready to receive a concrete form, she sighed, "And thus it got out of your system, I hope; good riddance; what a relief that must have been for you."

CHAPTER VIII

Episode of the Calf's Eyelashes

IN THE EARLY DAYS of my experimentation with mask-making, an odd idea obsessed me. It was a freakish scheme, as already mentioned in Chapter V, to make a mask so closely imitating nature that it could be mistaken for a living face. Feminine pulchritude was the theme. After weeks of painstaking drudgery the mask was nearly done; it had real hair and life-like complexion, but the problem of furnishing it with eyelashes proved to be my stumbling block. I tried all kinds of materials, but none of them would do. This almost made me drop the whole scheme as a hopeless task.

But just there and then the unexpected happened: I met a calf. By "calf" I mean a youthful daughter of a cow. She was hitched to a peg in a New Hampshire field. I saw her limpid eyes shaded by eyelashes that would make any cinema star green with envy. They were long and black, gracefully curved and glossy. They were exquisite! They were glorious! I saw my problem solved. With difficulty I resisted the dastardly impulse to pluck or snip off the glossy fringes then and there.

On my homeward stroll my thoughts dwelt on calf's eyelashes. The more I thought of them the more wonderful they seemed; their glamour dazzled me, the magnitude of my find thrilled me beyond words.

At supper I revealed the discovery to my table companions, but they did not care a rap for the wonders I raved about; they turned the conversation to fried livers and pickled pigs' feet. They informed me, however, that if I wanted calf's eyelashes, I could get them from any butcher

in town.

So on my arrival in New York, I rushed to the nearest meat market. The red-faced butcher was busy at his block, chopping off big steaks, legs of lamb and pork, with amazing dexterity and speed. I took my position in the line of housewives and waited my turn. A sudden harsh "next!" aroused me from my dreams and I promptly said:

"I should like to buy a pair of calf's eyelashes."

That made him explode. "We don't sell here eyelashes; we sell steaks, hams, veal, and we are busy! Eyelashes, ha! . . . Next!"

I was crushed.

To console myself I went to my club and at luncheon discussed my plight with my friends. Amidst hilarity it was agreed that if I wanted calf's eyelashes, I should go to slaughterhouses where they have complete calves with eyelashes, tails, and everything that constitutes a calf.

So to slaughterhouses I went. I plodded through the mud of ill-smelling streets, passed between rows of skinned calves hanging upside down, and finally was directed to the office where I should see the manager himself. A peroxide blonde ushered me through his office door into the sanctuary where, at a large glass-topped desk, the manager was concluding a deal with a stout customer. I overheard something about twenty carcasses of beef and thirty carcasses of veal. Presently the long invoice sheets were folded and the stout gentleman left.

The manager invited me to take a seat at his desk; he offered me a cigar, which I brazenly accepted. He lit it for me and lit his own. A secretary placed before us two long invoice sheets and we were all set for a big business transaction.

The manager's complacent smile and expectant look encouraged me to begin. I drew once more on my cigar,cleared my throat and gave him my order.

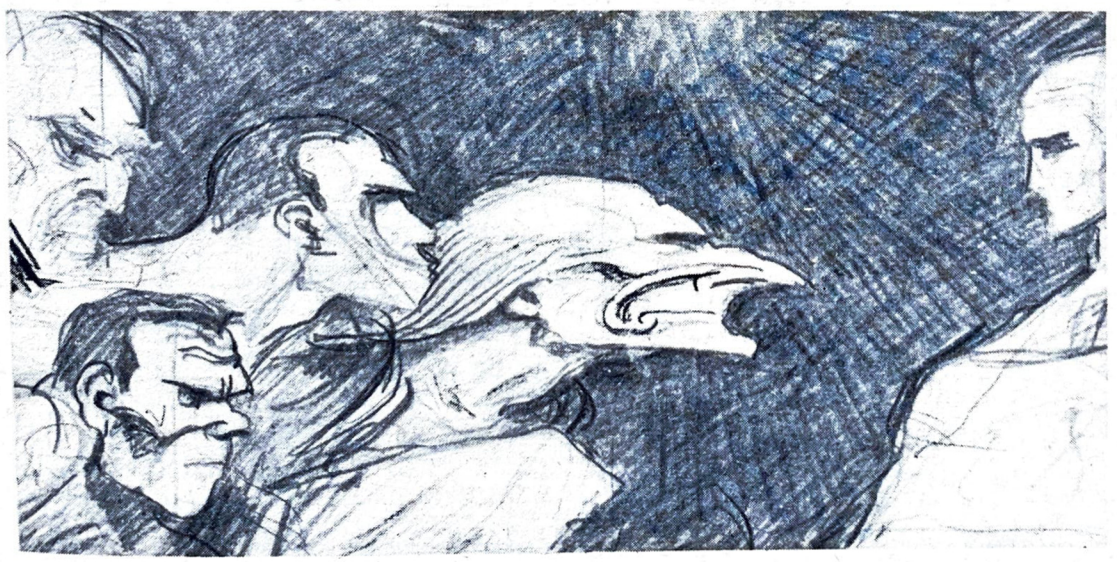
"I should like to buy a pair of calf's eyelashes."

I said that meekly, in a subdued, tremulous little voice, but the effect

of my words was like a crash of thunder. For a second I thought the manager was struck by apoplexy; his face turned scarlet, his teeth clenched, his hands convulsively crushed the invoice sheet, he was speechless, he stabbed me with his eyes. I wondered what was going to happen to me!

But instantly he recovered his composure. An amiable smile relighted his features, and in tones of seemingly genuine regret he informed me that unfortunately he was not in a position to accommodate me with a pair of calf's eyelashes as the Company's rules concerning minimum sales were exceedingly stringent. They stipulated that no less than six calves should constitute a sale.

I expressed my disappointment, we exchanged a few words about the weather and the situation in Uruguay, and he bowed me out most graciously. It is wise to be polite to one who comes to buy calf's eyelashes.



Study by Benda for a decorative composition.

GALLERY OF BENDA MASKS

THE MASKS PICTURED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES WERE ALL DESIGNED AND EXECUTED BY THE AUTHOR . . . THE PHOTOGRAPHS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, WERE ALSO BY BENDA

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES BY BENDA, ACCOMPANIED BY ILLUMINATING TEXT, MAY BE SEEN IN THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA

THE OLD WAG

This has the most complicated brass wire construction; every strand of the disheveled hair and beard has its wires, which are all connected between the layers of paper.

1920

GOLDEN BEAUTY

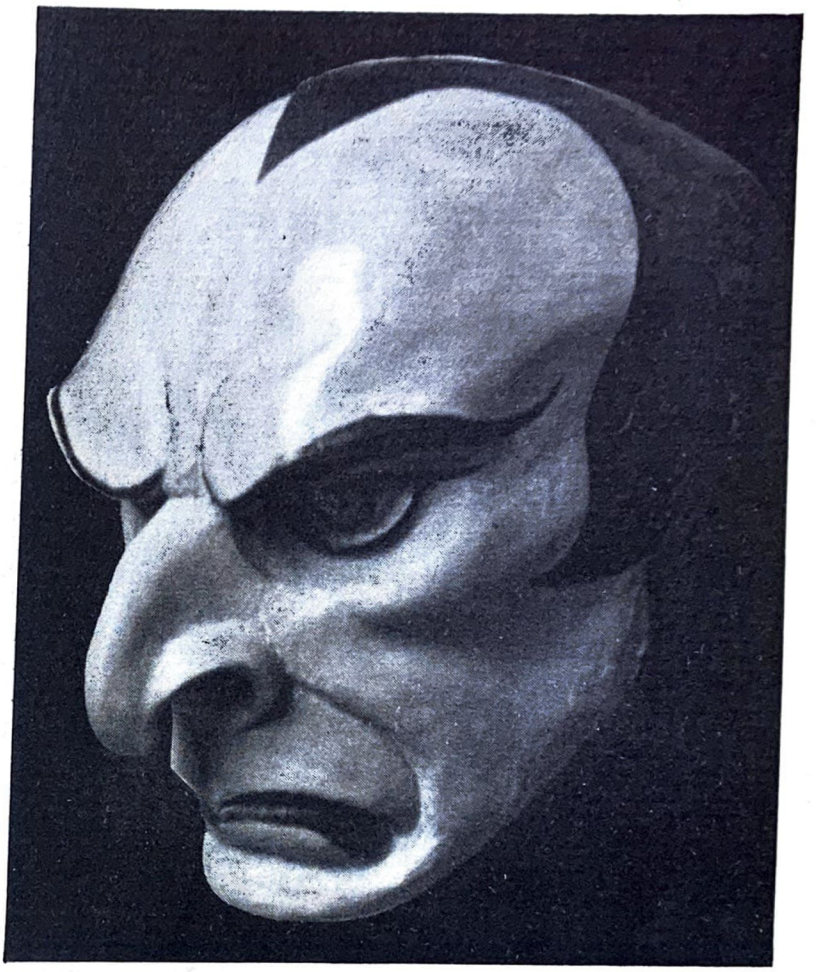
See page 72 for description.

THREE MAIDENS

Left to right: "Italian" (not reproduced elsewhere), "Circassian" (page 104), and "Golden Beauty" (above, and page 72). These were posed by Vogue models for Vanity Fair (Condé Nast Publications) in the beautiful garden of George Baker, Esq. Photographs by Arnold Genthe.

EAGLE MAN

Combining human and aquiline characteristics. Light tan, reddish brown, golden iris of the eye.

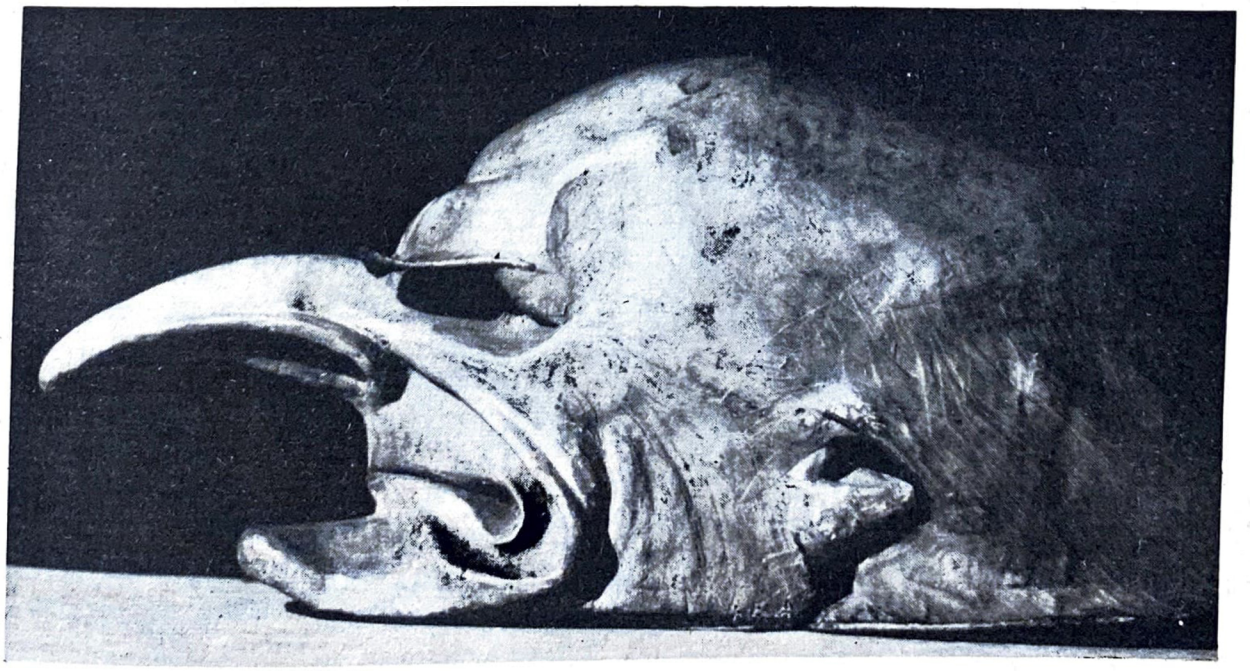


1927

THE CONSPIRATOR

His sinister appearance is intensified by his livid, cadaverous complexion. See the notes on exaggeration and rhythmic coordination, page 22.

1929



1920

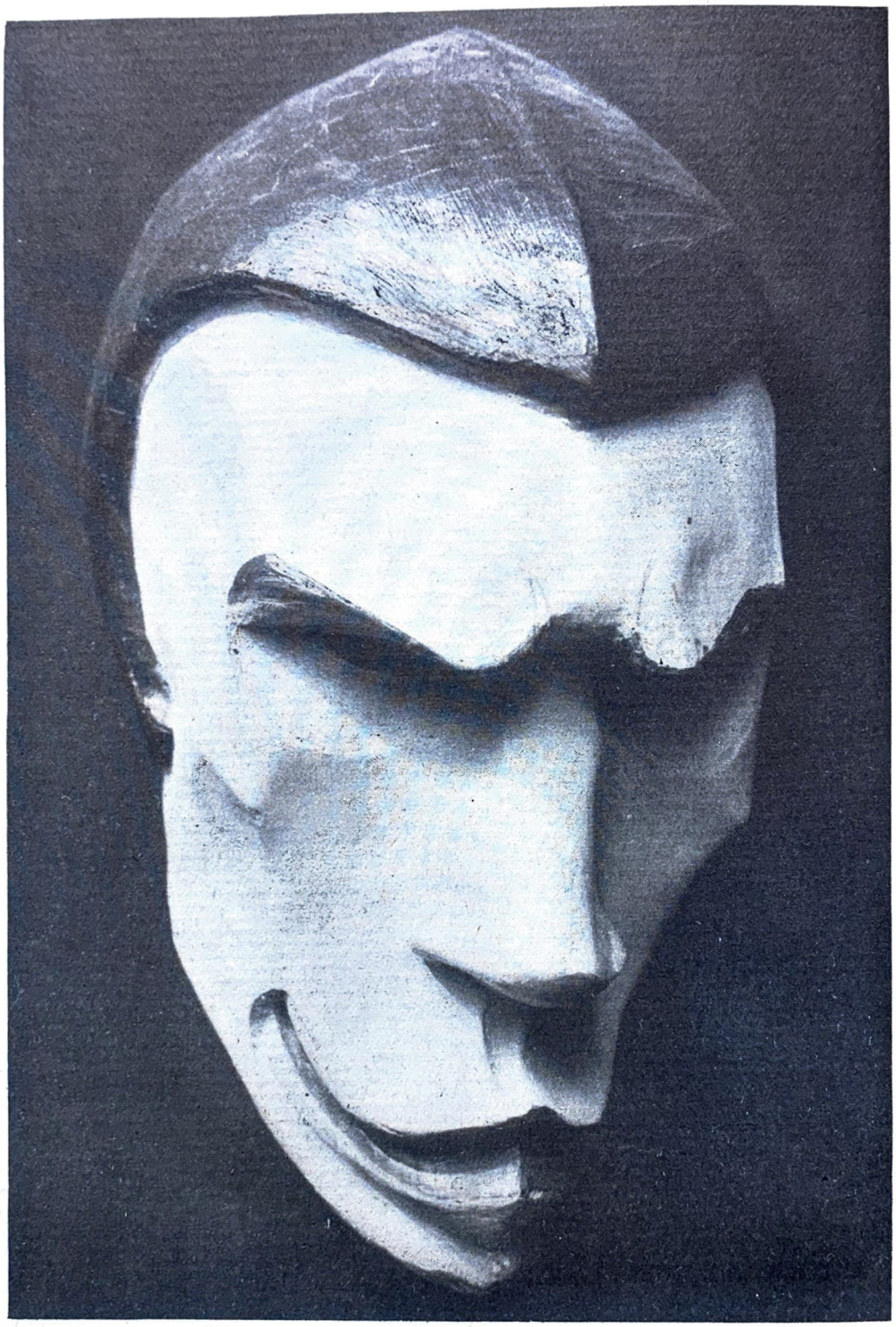
GOLDEN BEAUTY

Generally considered to be one of the best Benda masks. It is constructed directly (without previous modeling in clay) and most elaborately finished. (See also page 70.)

1930

LONG EYES

The great length of the eyes is a logical outcome of the peculiar formation of the face, which rapidly slants laterally backward from the profile line.



1931

BABOON MAN

Constructed of variously-shaped pieces of Bristol board, and strengthened by twenty layers of paper. Its sinister character induces the wearer to assume mean and stealthy postures and action.

1931

BEELZEBUB

He is jade green with little touches of coral; his eyes are gold.
Made for the purpose of frightening the spectators.

1936

BEAUTE DU DIABLE

One of the most elaborately finished Benda masks, personifying exuberant and glamorous youth. Golden hair, rosy complexion, and cherry lips.

1917

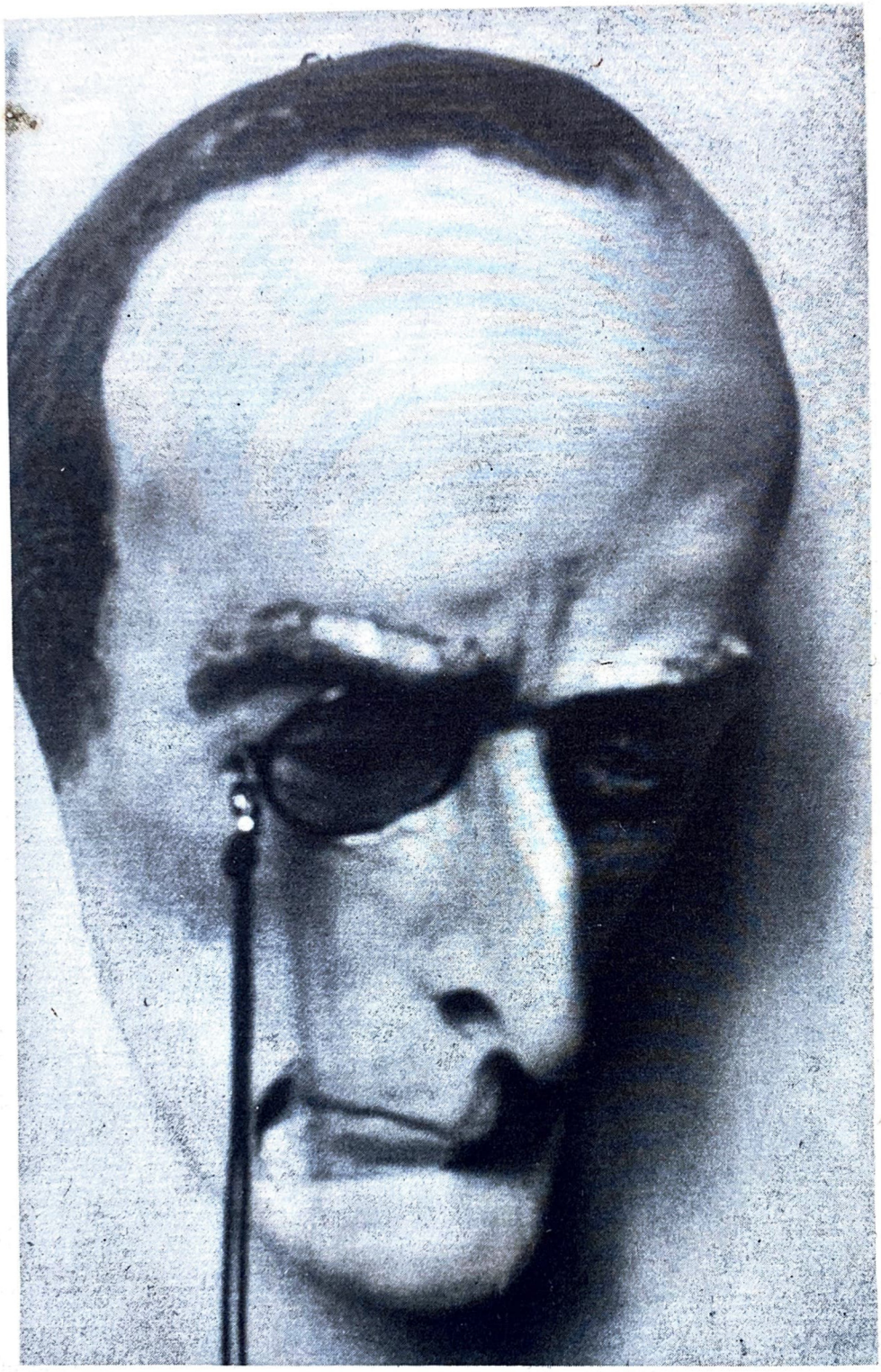
ALGERIAN DANCER

The only Benda mask with real hair and materials other than paper. An early creation.

1930

ODALISQUE

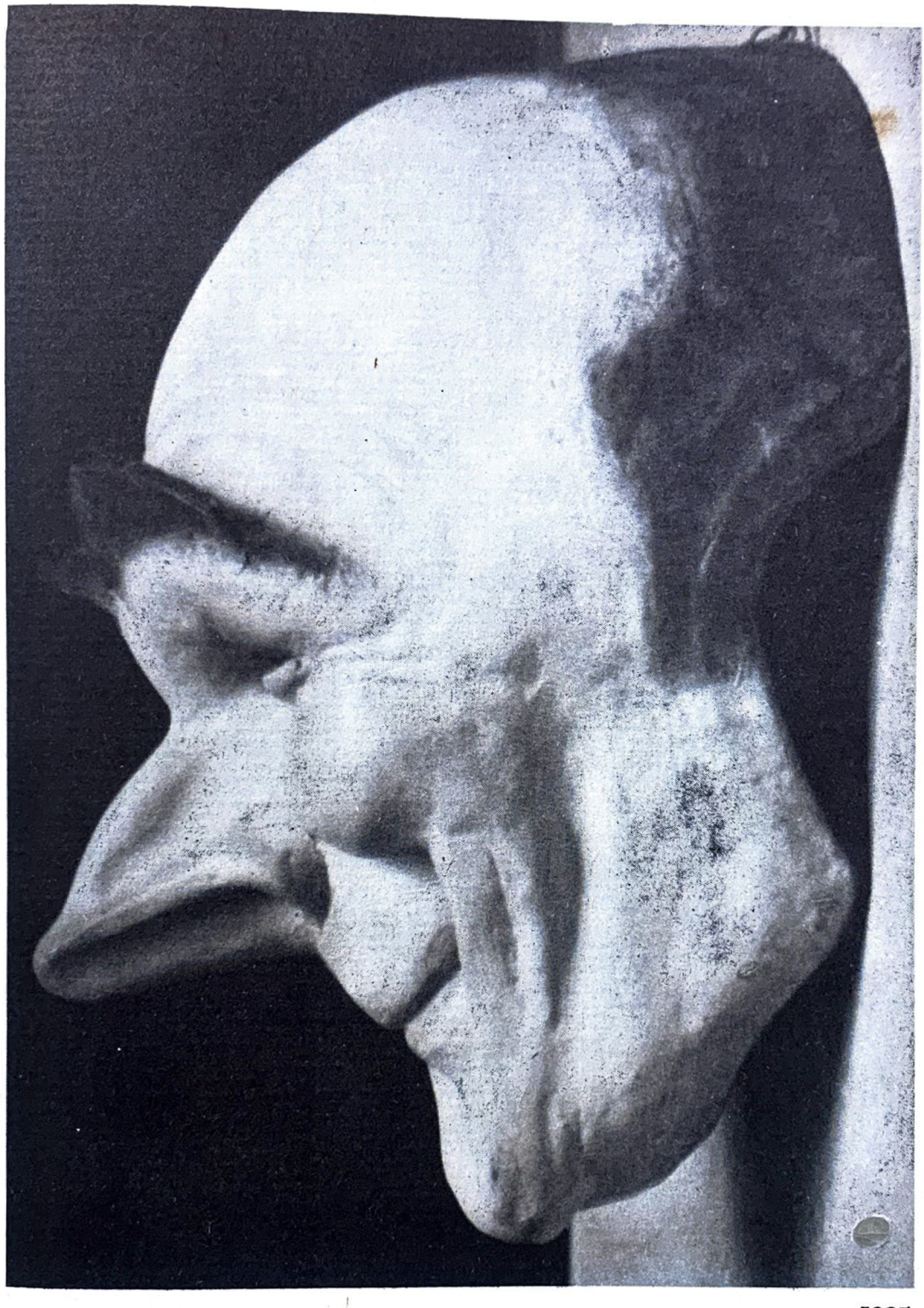
For experiment's sake, the Arab features were given a fair complexion.



1927

ENGLISH STATESMAN

His monocle can be removed and replaced in the invisible grooves around the eye. "Pomp and Circumstance" is his favorite musical accompaniment.



1925

THE JESTER

Known also as "Mr. Snodgrass." Much used on the stage in pantomime.

1940

LADY DISDAIN

Also called "The Bostonian." It forces its wearer to assume superior manners and erect postures. It is constructed directly by the first method.

1923

DOLOROSA

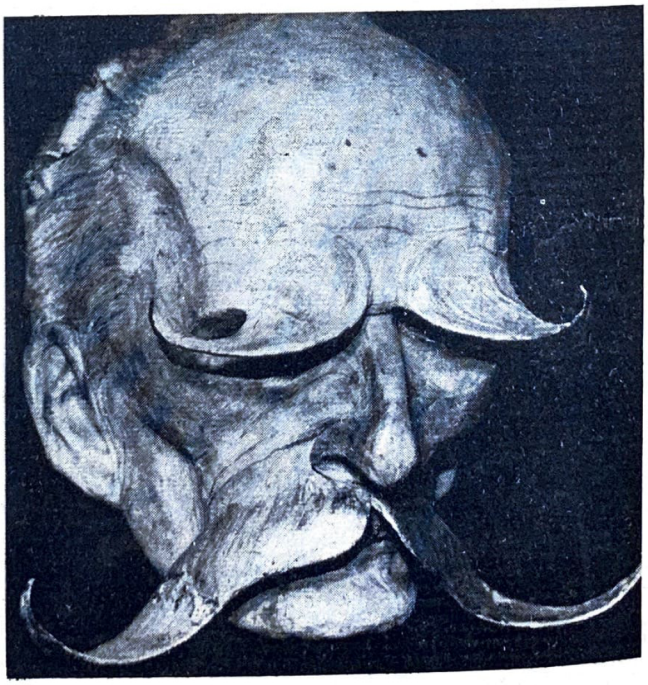
Meant to be worn with black draperies; its small size makes the wearer appear very tall.

1926

CICISBEO

"Gigolo" is also a proper name for this young man.

1925

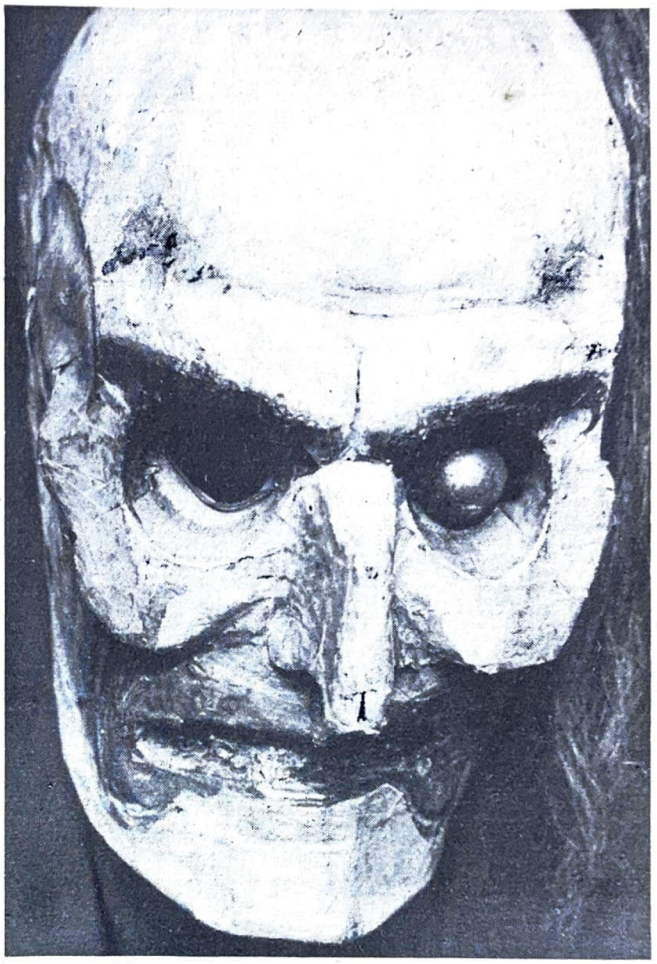


VOYEVODE

Voyevode (Wojewoda) is a governor of a province in Poland. The hair and mustache of this mask are silver; the complexion is ruddy.

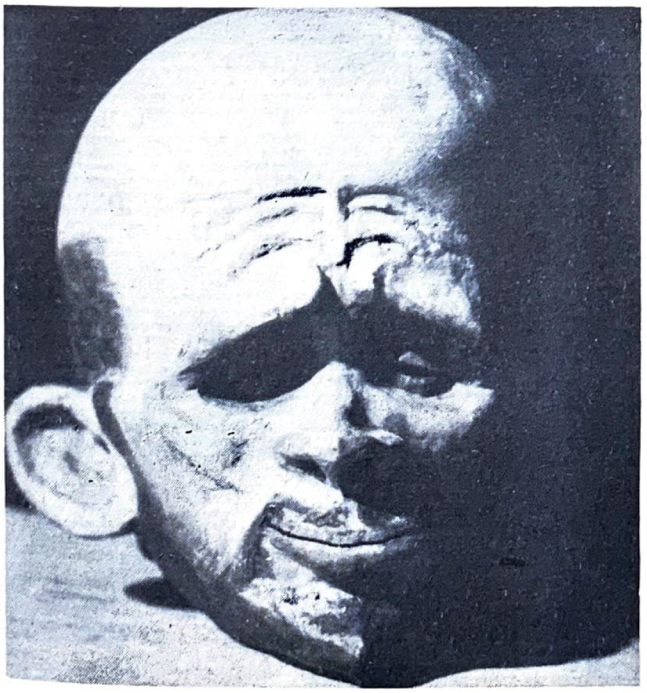
PESTILENCE

Made expressly to give shudders to the onlookers. Its livid, greenish complexion and generally cadaverous appearance, with a tattered, blood-stained, gray shroud, produce a really ghastly apparition.



1922

1926



A VILLAGE SCRIBE

One of the few Benda masks that cover the wearer's head entirely.

1930

A SAD NEGRO

One of the few Benda masks with eyes. In most cases actual eyes disturb the mysterious quality of a mask.

1926

UBANGI NEGRO

His satin-finish complexion is achieved by shellac and linseed oil polish, like that used on mahogany furniture.

1919

BLUE DEMON AND RAMHORN

Here the author and a friend are posing in the masks shown at larger scale on pages 97 and 99.

SEA MONSTER

Its fish-like appearance is emphasized by its glossy, silvery and golden surface with iridescent color design. It is worn over the top of the actor's head.

1932

1934

CHINESE DEMON

Constructed in the style of Chinese masks. It has vivid coloring: Chinese vermilion, emerald green, black, and rich gold.

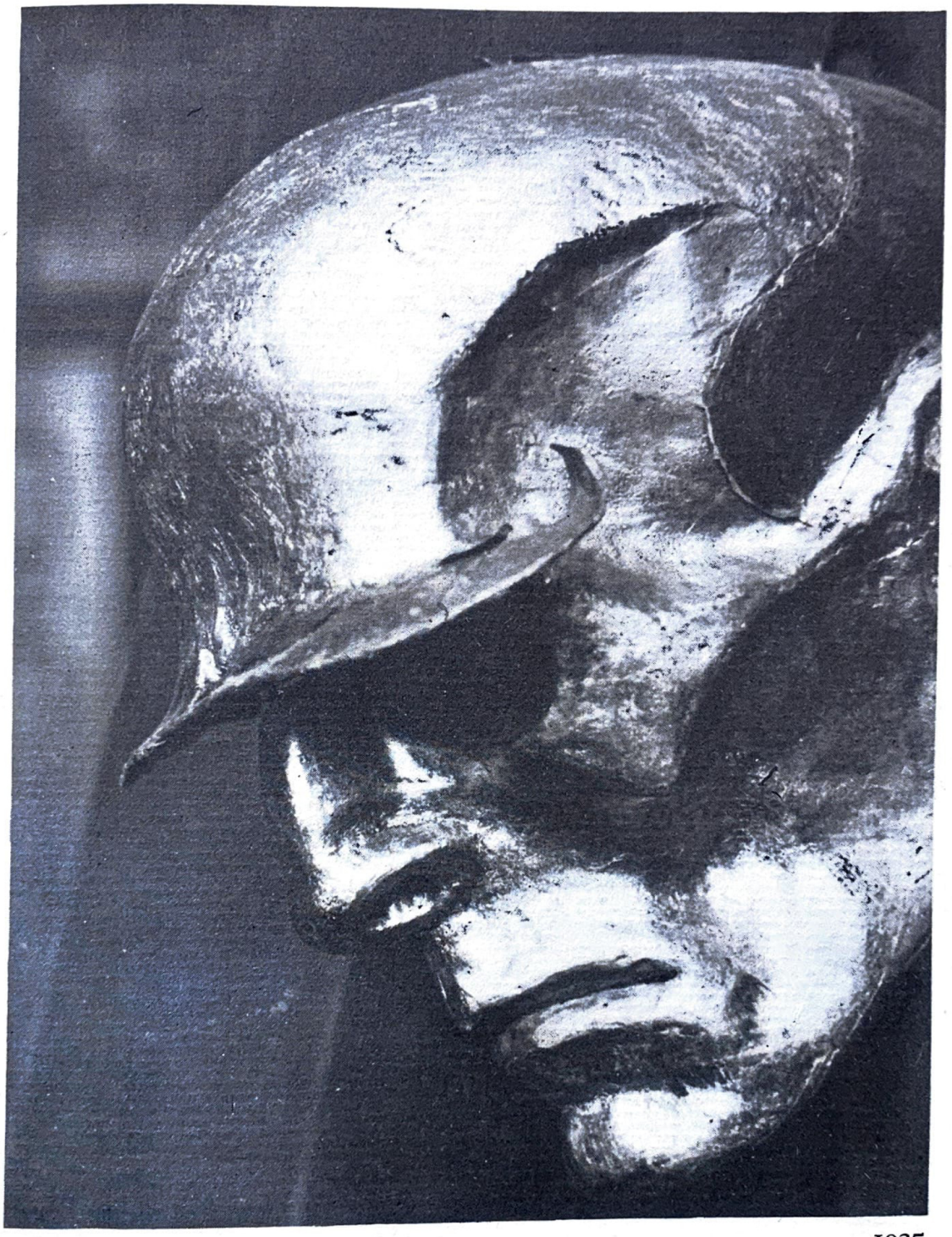
GREEK TRAGOEDIA MASK

This is a solid, decorative mask in the style of the ancient Greek Tragoedia masks.

1926

EXECUTIONER

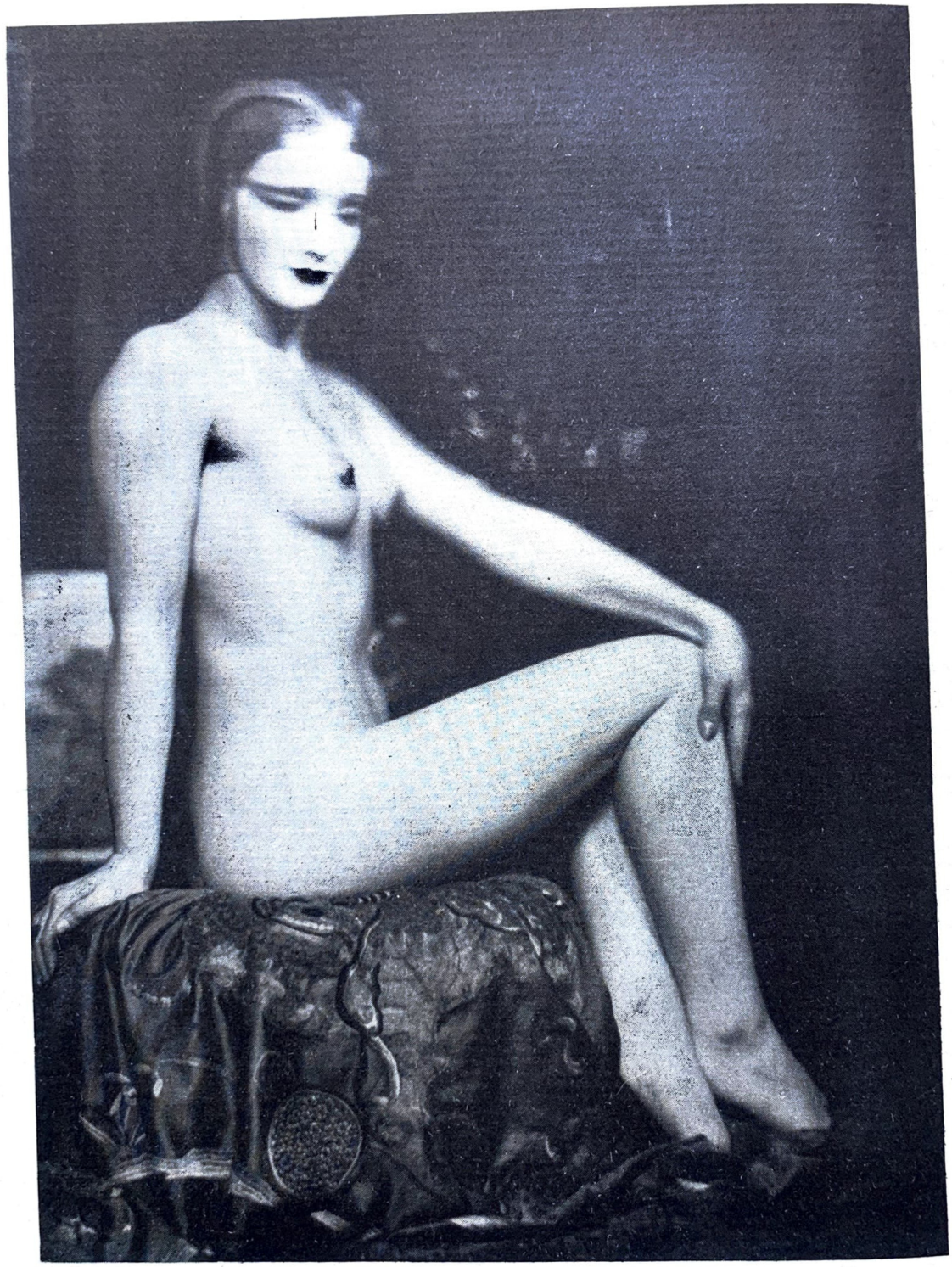
This mask can just as well impersonate a pugilist, a piano mover, or a truck driver.



1925

THE SPIRIT OF WAR

A large decorative mask all covered with burnished gold leaf, the eyebrows shaped like the visor of a helmet.



1930

LONG EYES

With the mask on she could not be recognized by her own mother or father.

1932

JAVANESE DANCER

Showing how the mask harmonizes with the body and how it influences the character of the figure. *(See also page 103.)*

1922

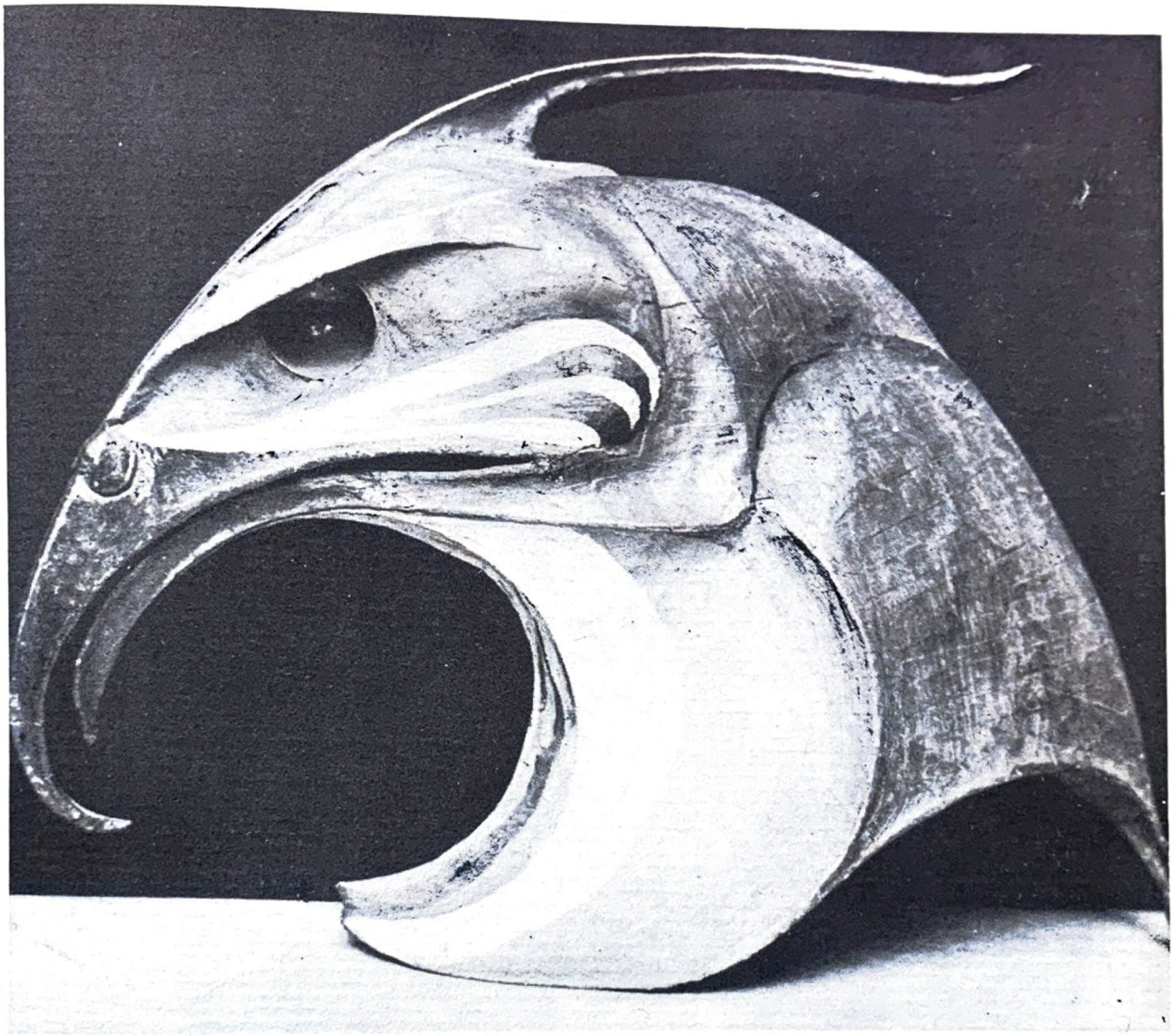
1924

PHOENIX

This counterpart of the "Bird of Prey" mask on the facing page is built on a brass wire armature. The wearer's head fits into the neck of the mask; there is an opening which permits vision and breathing.

WABBLY GOBLIN

Gray-green, with orange and coral design. It was seen on stages in America, Europe, and Australia.



1928

1931

BIRD OF PREY

Like the "Phoenix" mask opposite, this is built on brass wire armature—see diagram, page 41. It is worn like the other.

FURIA

Her ivory-white face, black hair, and the golden irises of her eyes look their best with scarlet draperies.

1944

KATHARINE HEPBURN AS "JADE"

This is Benda's impression of this noted star of the screen as she appeared with Chinese make-up for her part of "Jade" in "Dragon Seed," a film version of Pearl S. Buck's story. As this volume goes to press, this mask is being widely employed for promotional purposes. Photo. courtesy Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

1924

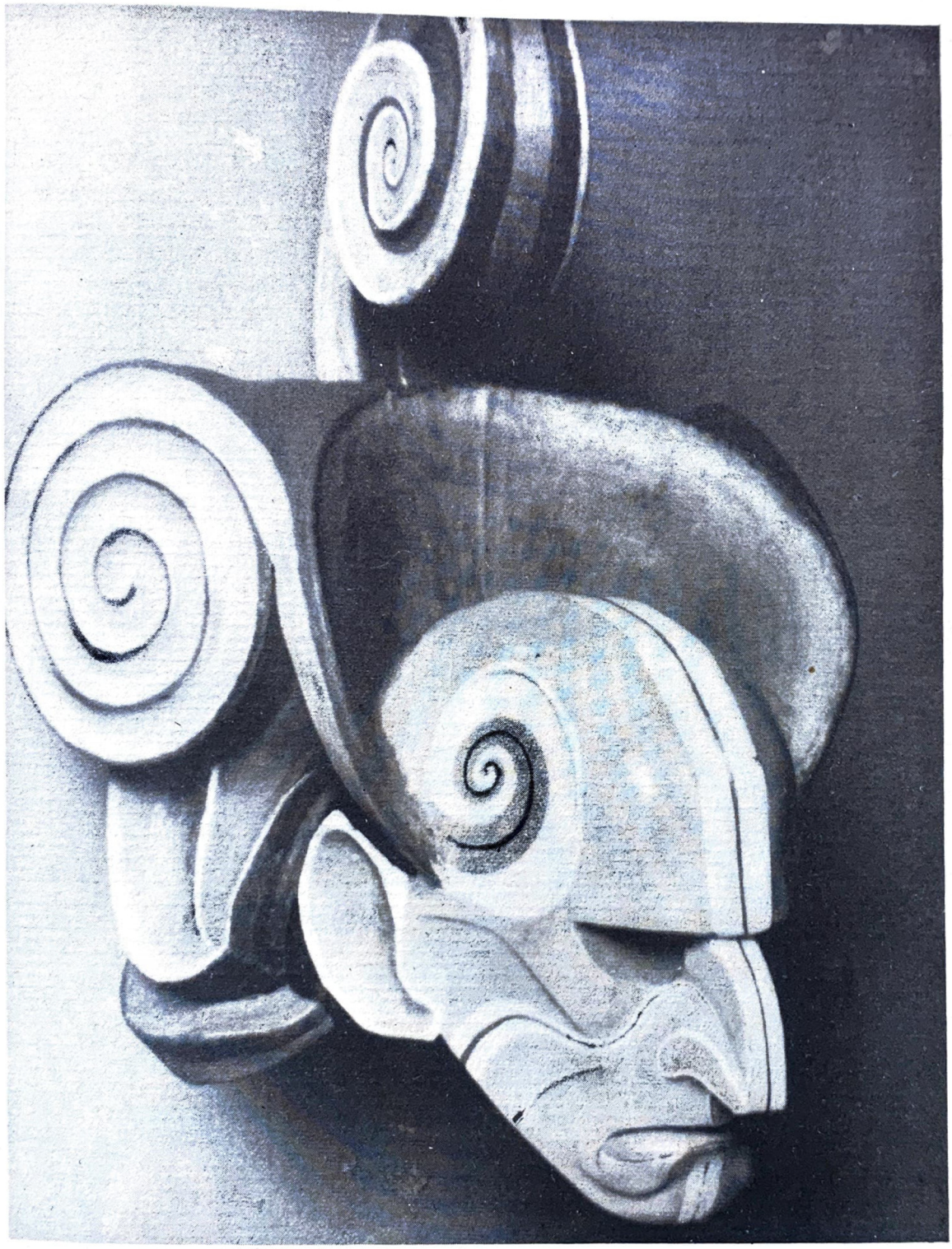
A JINNEE

This is a very large mask, being part of an articulated figure eleven feet high.

1920

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

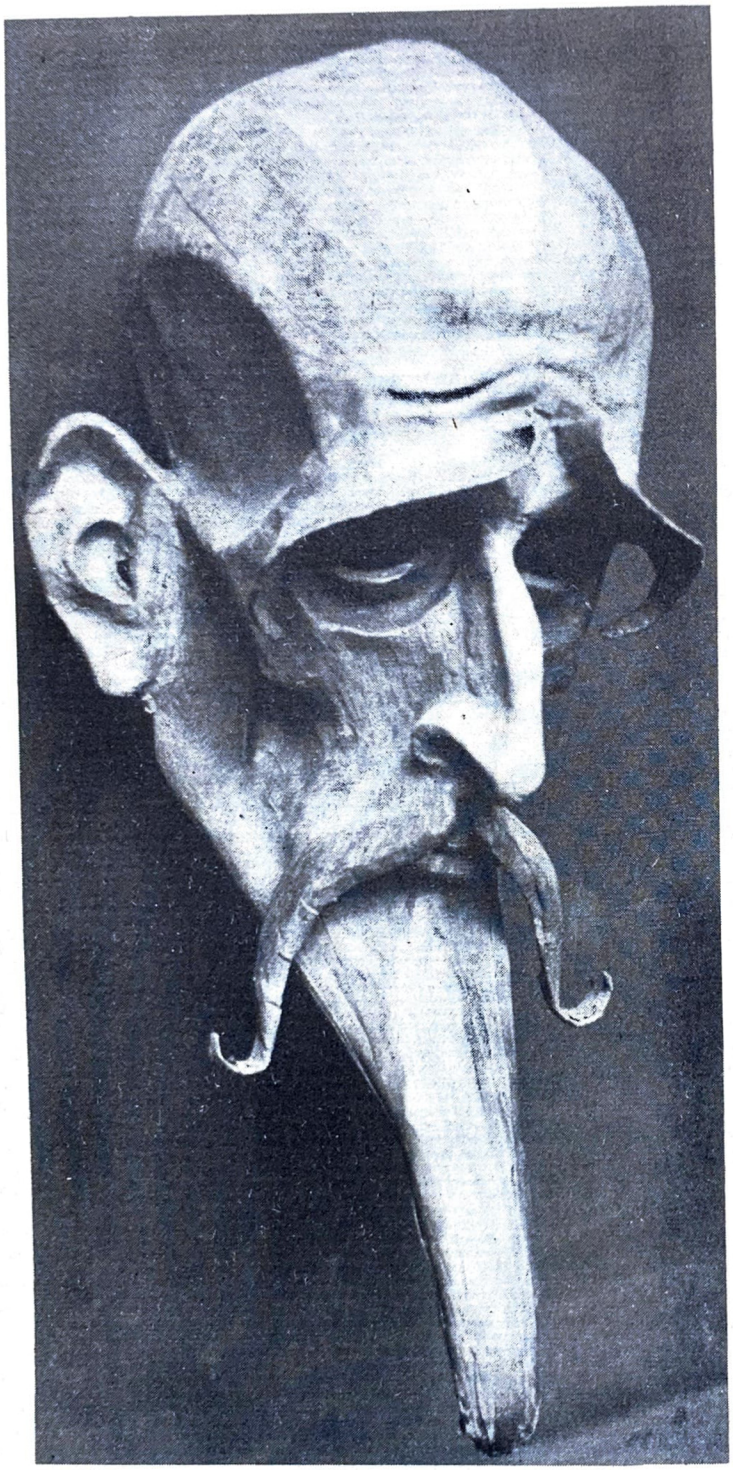
Constructed of Bristol board, reinforced with twenty layers of paper and edged with brass wire. It is ivory-white with gray zebra stripes and coral red forehead.



1914

THE BLUE DEMON

This is the first mask made by the author in February 1914. The headgear was added a year later, and the whole reconstructed and given the present finish in 1939. (See also page 86.)



1925

DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA

The Gothic structure of his head, and the stylized, haggard features are of ashen, sallow complexion, as though he were dug out of a heap of cinders.

1935

OCTOGENARIAN

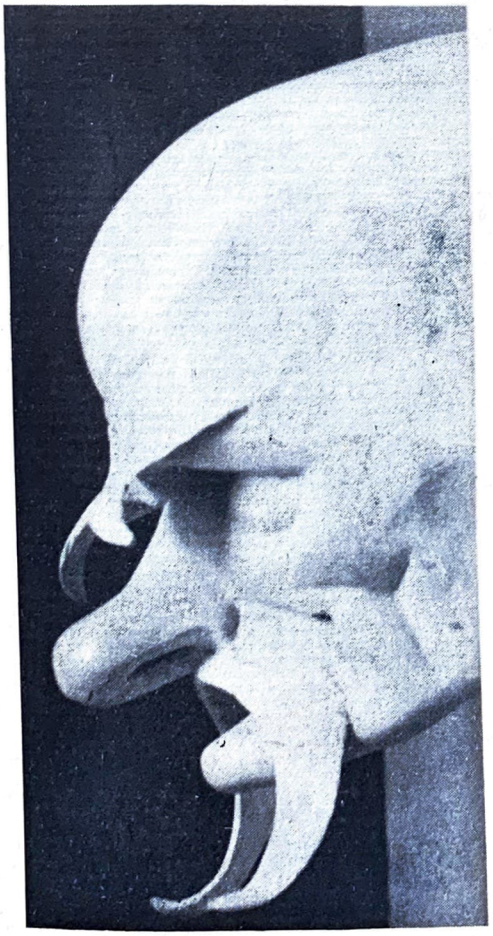
His bald head is highly polished; his silvery beard reinforced with many brass wires.

RAMHORN

First made in 1918, this was reconstructed and completed in 1942. Colors: Ivory-white, jade green, coral red; horns, golden.
(See also page 86.)

1918

1940



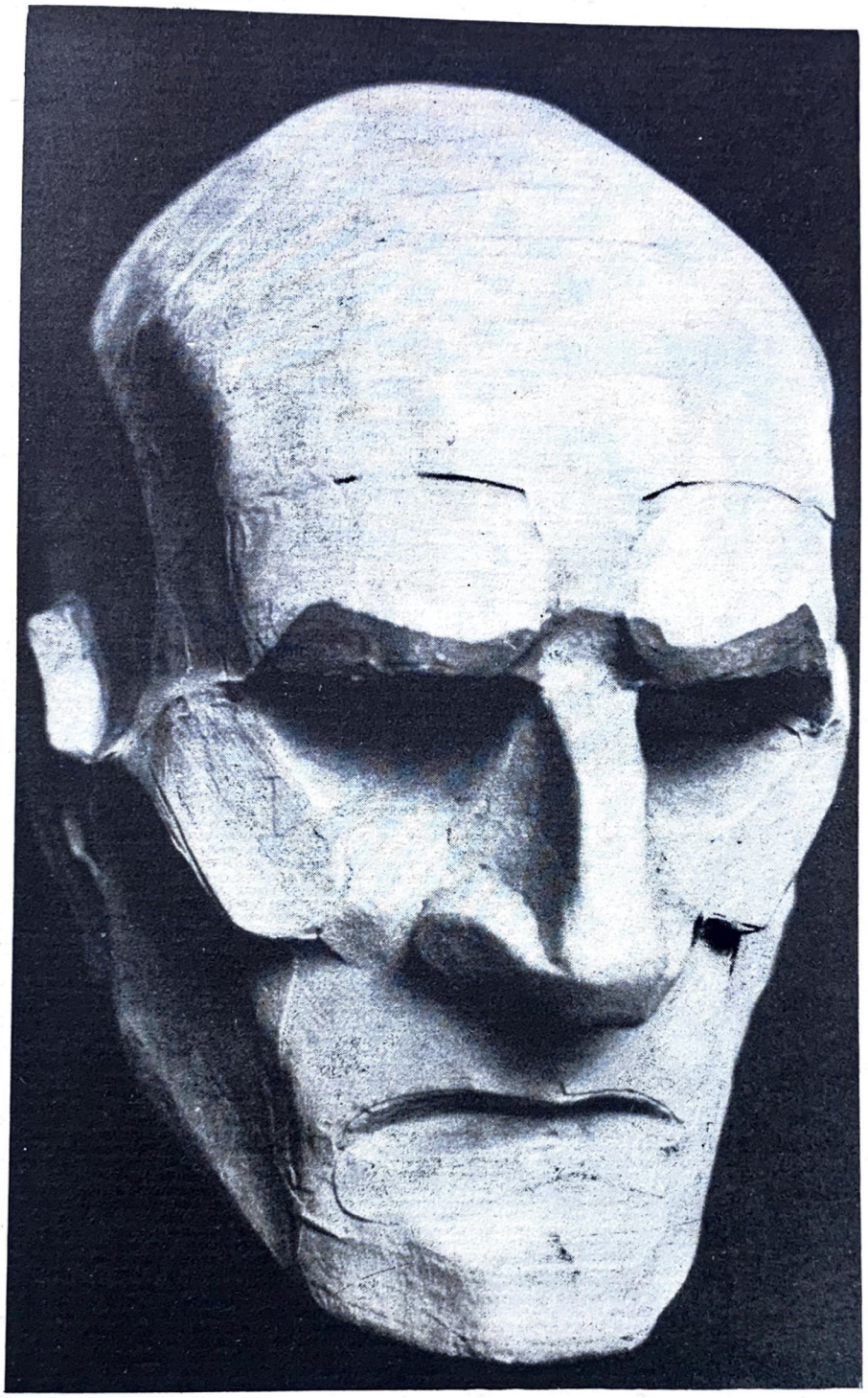
A VETERAN

This is the result of observing a toothless nonagenarian still trying to display military manners.

1923

PITHECANTHROPUS

A somewhat fantastic representation of the prehistoric man, or, rather, the man-ape. It is turquoise blue, in absolute disregard of realities, but in favor of decorative values.



1916

THE ASCETIC

The fourth mask made in the inchoative experimental period. It is constructed directly of paper, considerably improved in later years. Used on the stage in The Greenwich Village Follies.

1921

GOLDEN GODDESS

Worn on the stage for a number of seasons: In America, in "The Greenwich Village Follies"; in England, in "The League of Notions"; also, in Paris and in Australia. (Property of Melvin Eaton, Esq., Norwich, N. Y.)

1932

JAVANESE DANCER

A mask much used by dancers on the stage. Its headgear is detachable as shown on page 91.

1939

MOORISH GIRL

Also called "The Lips."

1917

CIRCASSIAN

Grace Christie danced with this mask for several seasons on the stages of America, Europe, and Australia. The mask is still in perfect condition. *(See also page 70.)*

SILLY DOLL

With her look of constant surprise, she has amused audiences all over the world and found her way into the Encyclopaedia Britannica, where there is a full-color portrait of her. For another photograph, see page 117.

1918

1928

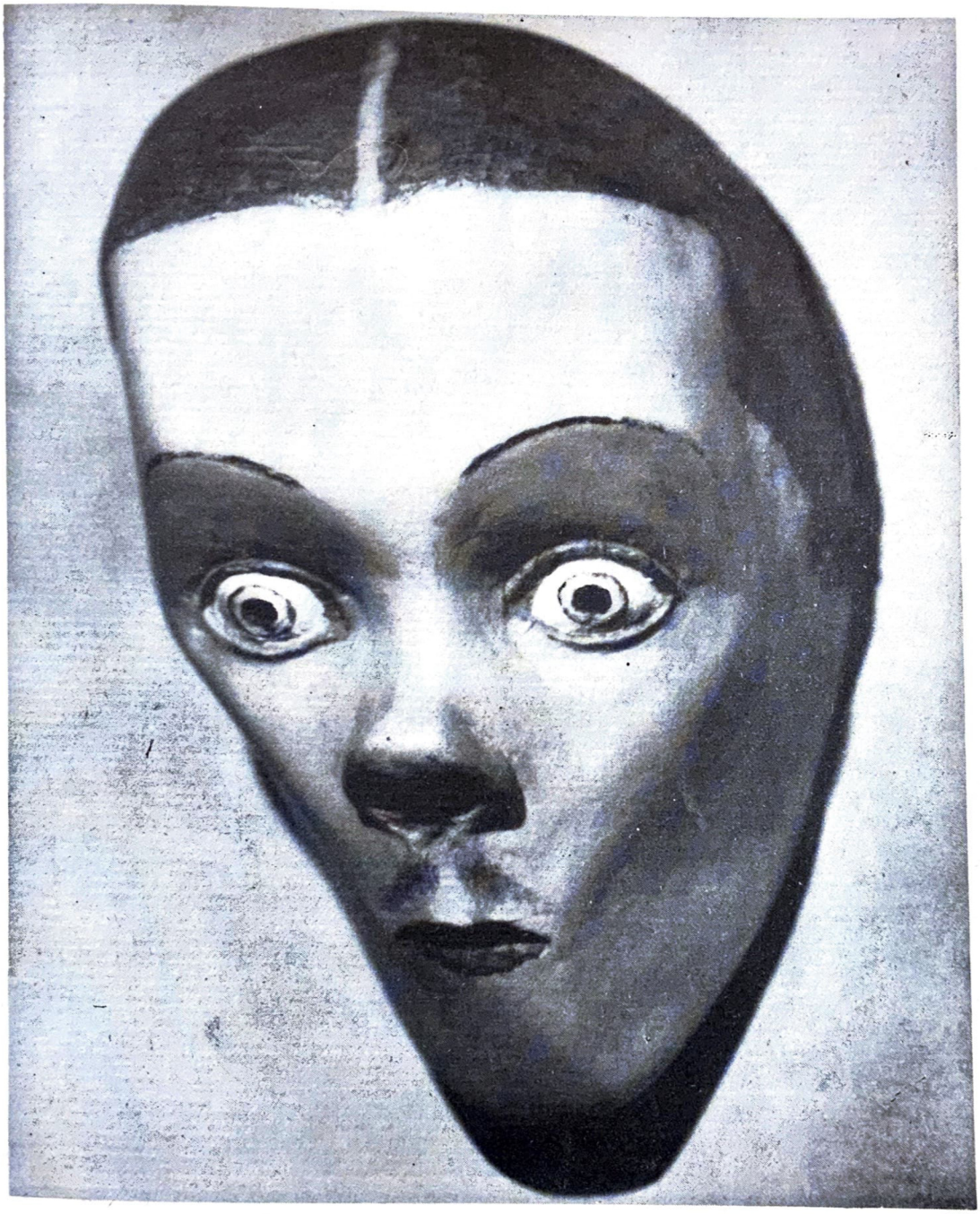
TATIANKA

An Ukrainian peasant girl. A study in plumpness.

1939

MORON

He can also personify a silly waiter, as well as a satyr. (Property of the Society of Illustrators, New York.)



1926

NINCOMPOOP

Symbolizing the stupefied state of mind of a freshman dazed by the ordeals of hazing.

1918

GEISHA

To us, the Mongolian faces look pushed in; to the Mongolian, our features must seem pushed out. Our dancers complain that their noses do not fit in this mask's nose.

1920

GOLDEN PEACOCK

As shown on the stage, with voluminous golden draperies on a tall actress, combined with exceedingly restrained motions, this mask suggests some unknown eastern goddess. (See also the colored frontispiece, and the photograph on page 116.)

PIRATE

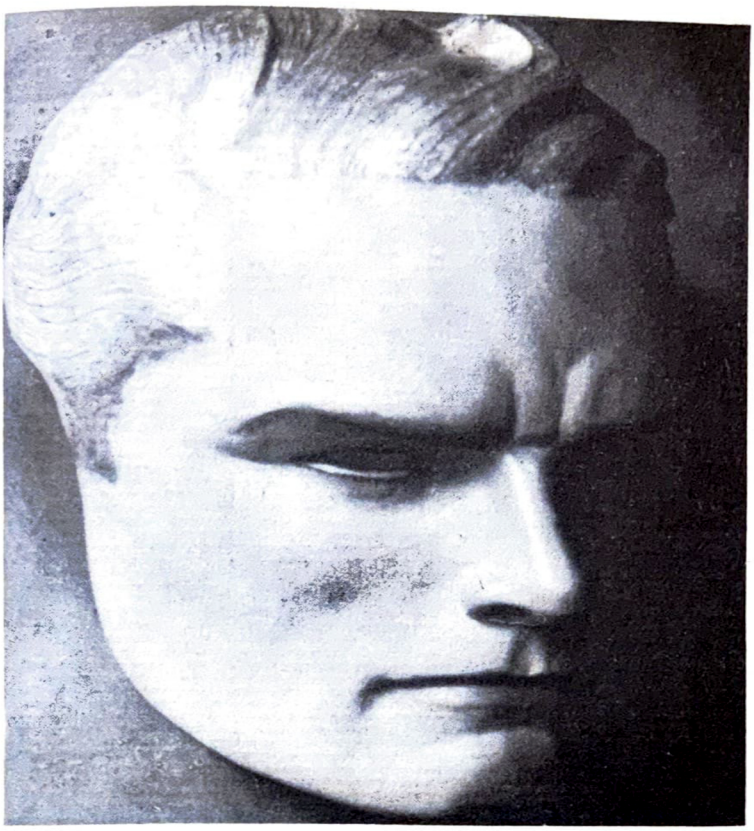
This is a roughly-made mask, unvarnished and unpainted; the face is of the natural brown of the unbleached paper, the hair blackened with India ink.

1926

THE MISER

The mummer wearing this mask cannot resist assuming the stoop and the tottering movements of a rheumatic octogenarian.

1935

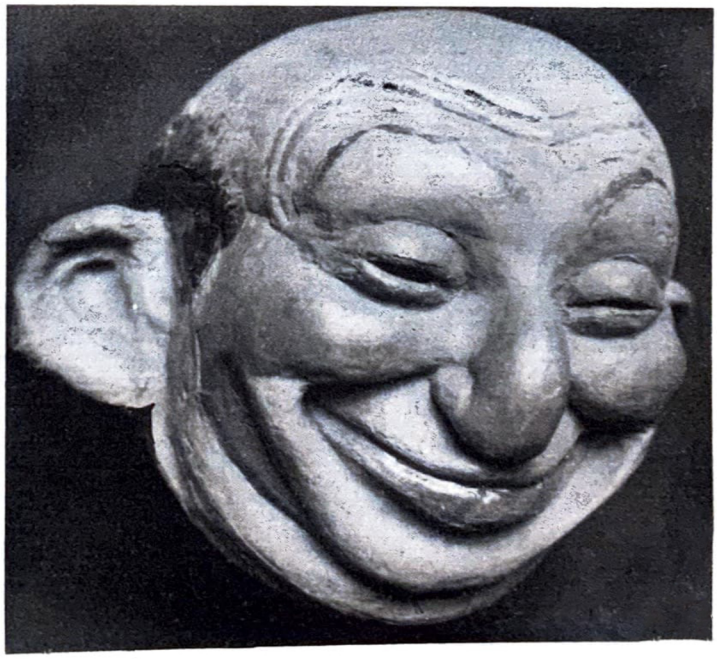


1943

A SOLDIER

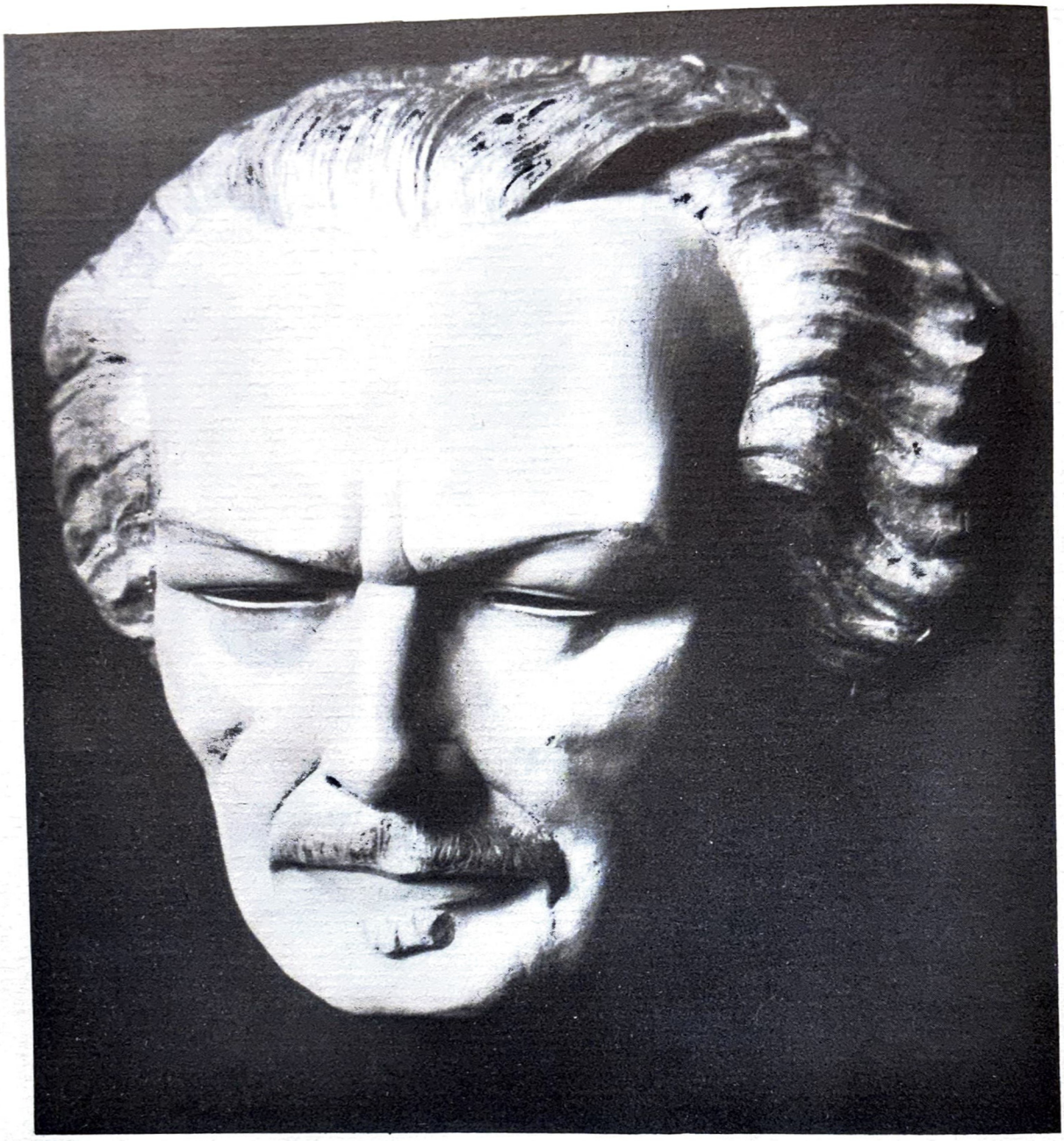
Gold leaf, slightly tinted, gives the effect of blonde hair.

1925



PLUTOCRAT

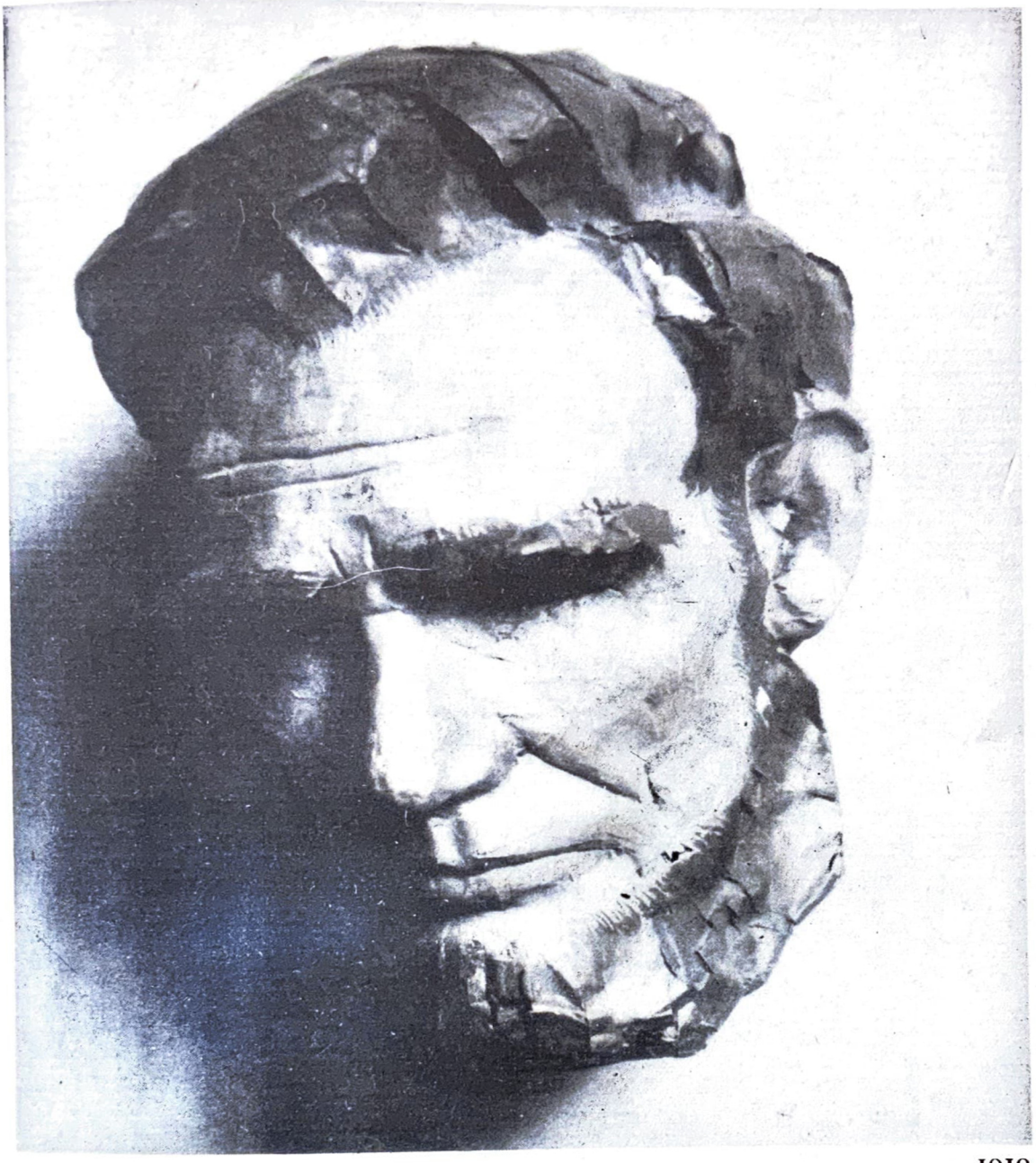
Also called "The Theatrical Producer," or "Mr. Pimplestein." The large size of this mask dwarfs the stature of the wearer, making him look squat.



1940

I. J. PADEREWSKI

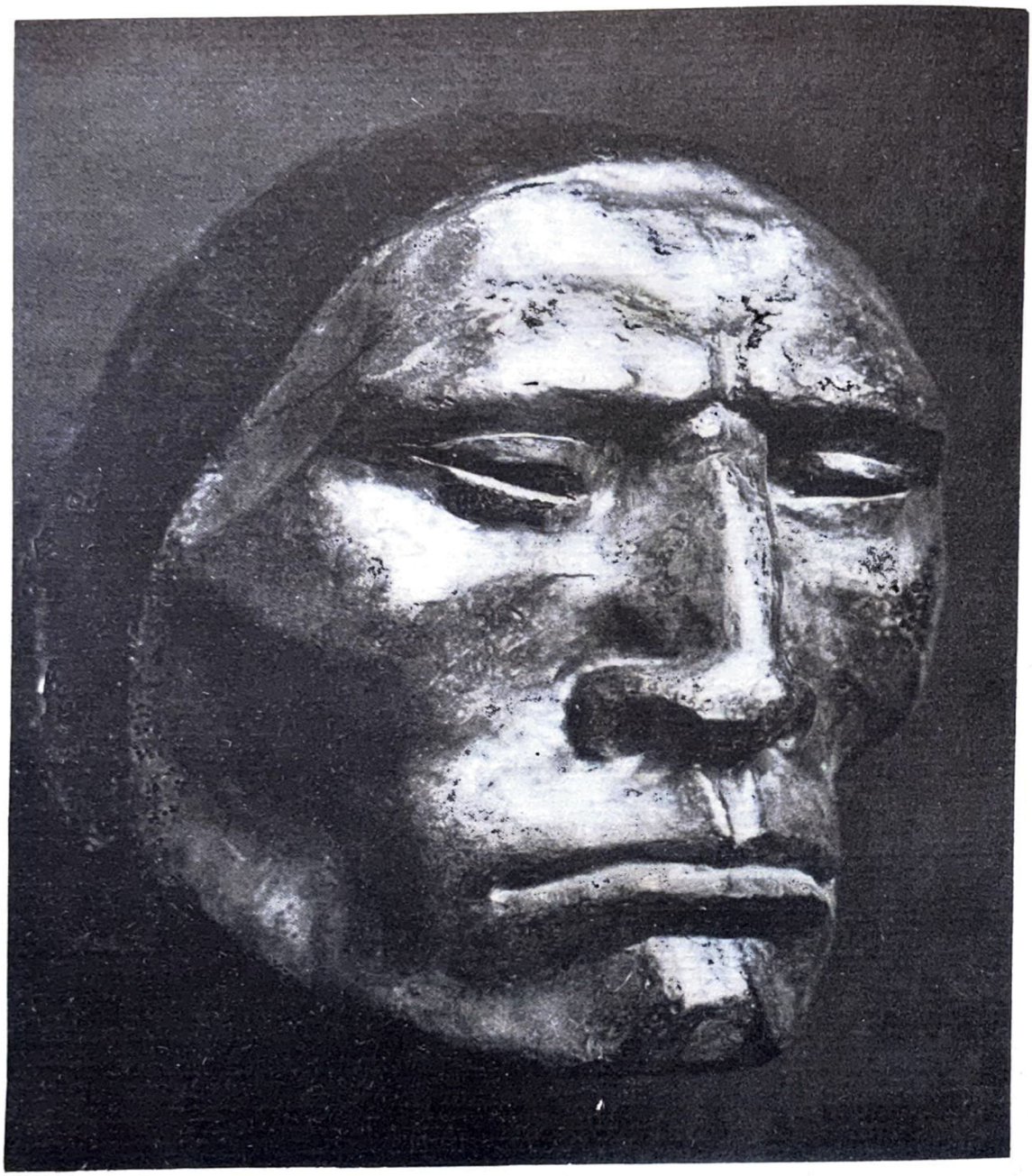
A large decorative mask, twice life size. The hair is golden, slightly tinted. It represents the maestro as he looked in 1927. (Property of Messrs. Steinway & Sons.)



1919

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A simply made mask, neither varnished nor painted; only the hair, eyebrows, and beard are tinted dark brown.



1926

SIOUX INDIAN

Gold leaf, tinted with transparent rose madder, gives him his copper complexion. He needs a war bonnet and a red blanket.

1916

CALIF AL MANSUR

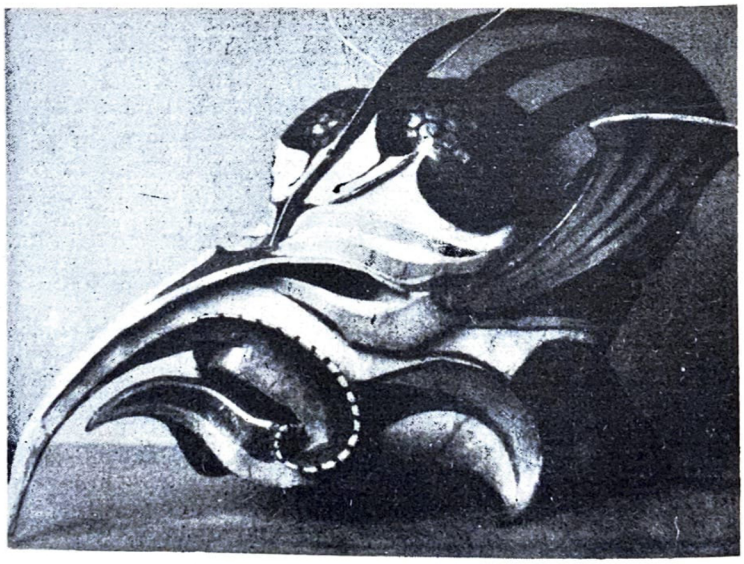
Constructed of unbleached paper directly, without previous studies in clay. As in the case of other masks made before 1918, it is rather heavy.

1920

GOLDEN PEACOCK

This is the same mask shown in our colored frontispiece, and again on page 109. It is one of the most popular Benda creations, and deservedly so.

1923



THE INSECT

Also called "The Mosquito." It is of ivory color with pale green and coral design. Its deep-set human eyes peer from under the multiple golden insect eyes.

SILLY DOLL

This mask, already shown on page 105, was here worn by Ruth Baxter on the auditorium stage of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., November 11, 1937. Photo. by Harris-Ewing Photographic News Service.

1918

CLEOPATRA

Her headgear is covered with burnished gold leaf and sparsely polychromed.

1936

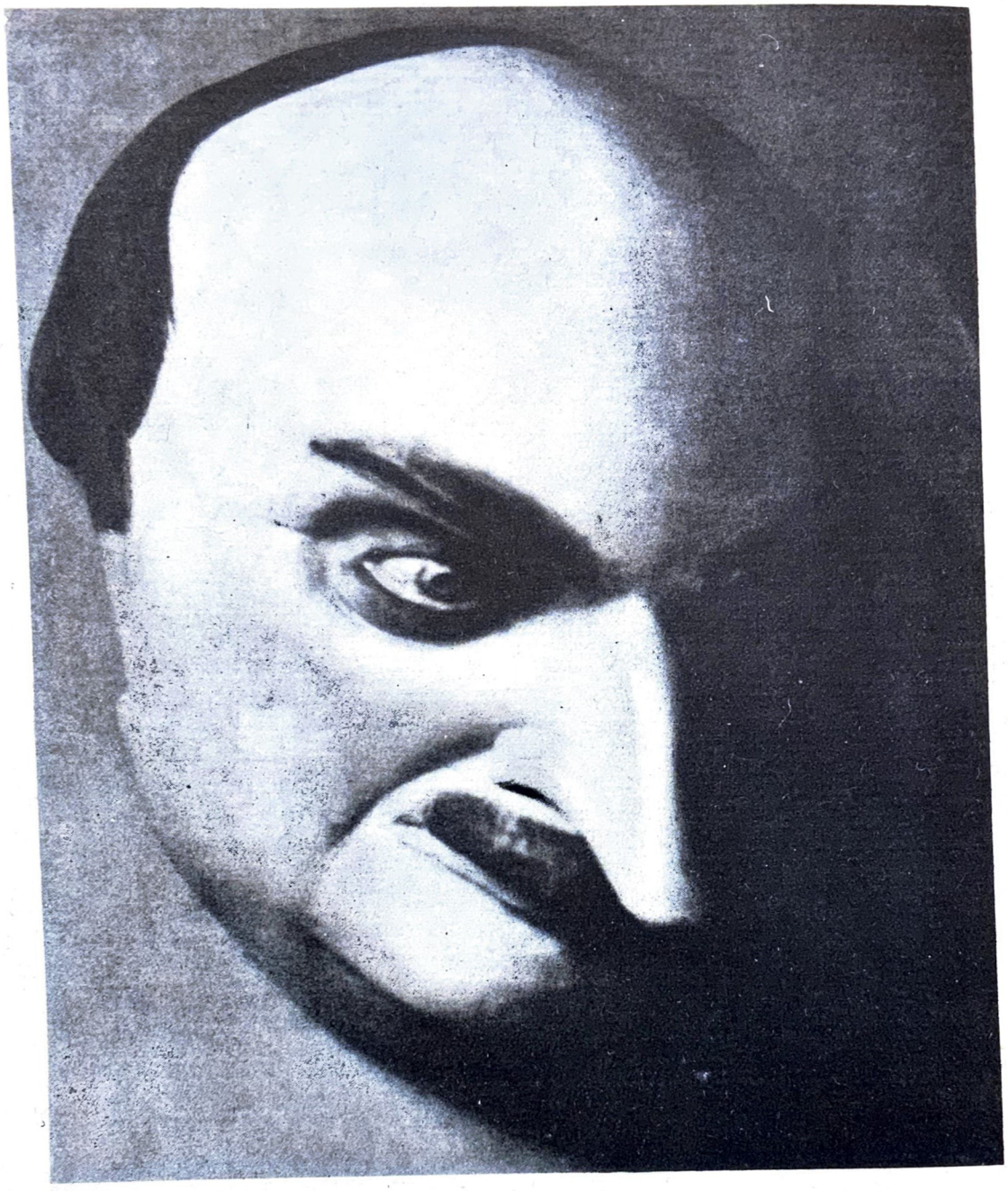
DAPHNE

One of the most effective of Benda's masks on the stage. It was made by the direct method.

1941

SAPPHO

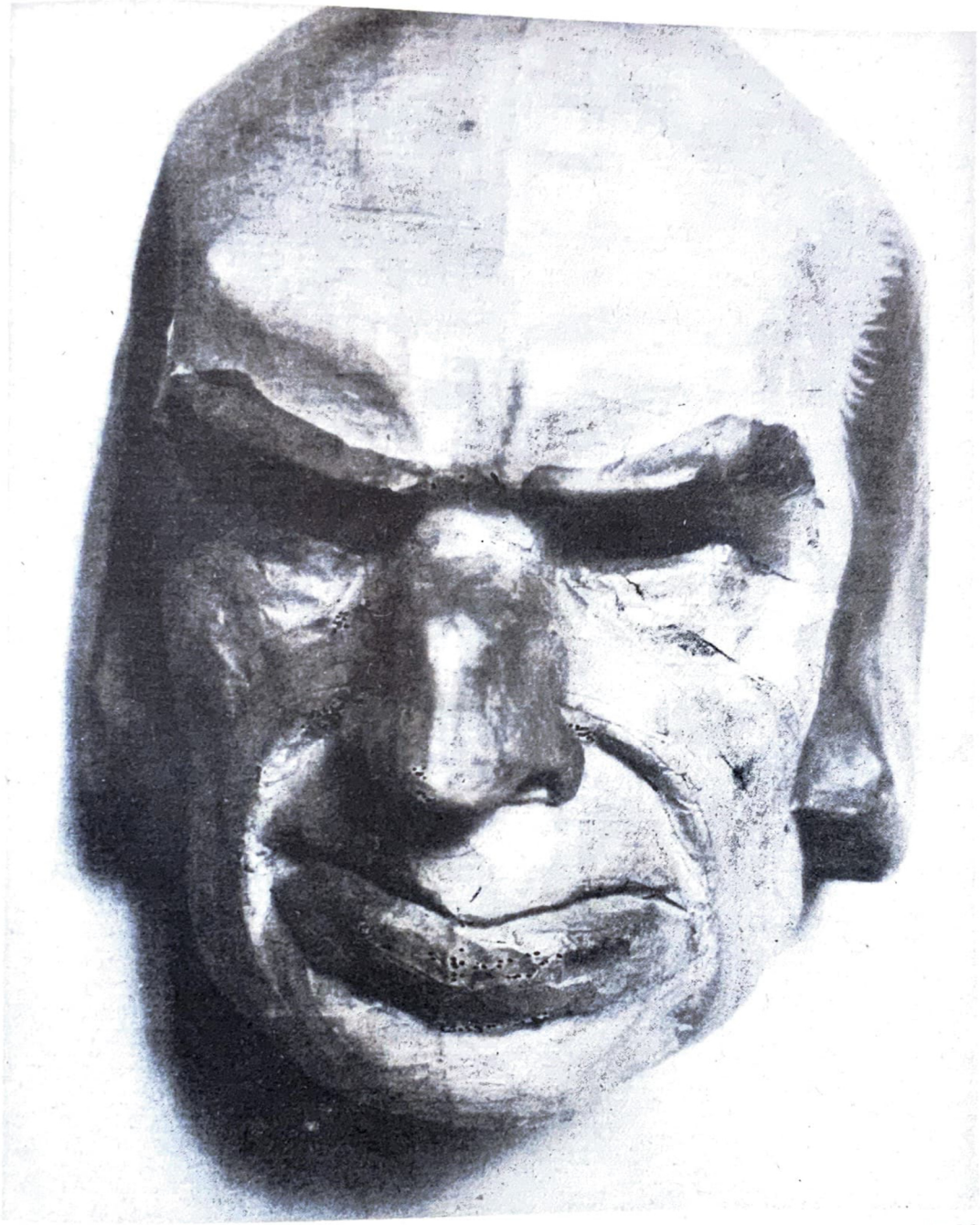
Her snow-white face, black hair, and crimson lips are calculated to produce an unusual effect on the stage. Extreme simplification was the motif.



1943

L'HOMME D'AFFAIRES

Epitomizing a sagacious and crafty French businessman. The irises of his shrewd, penetrating eyes are light blue; his complexion is florid.



1930

THE LAWYER

Roughly constructed of brown unbleached paper, unvarnished and unpainted; only the hair and eyebrows are blackened with India ink.

1920

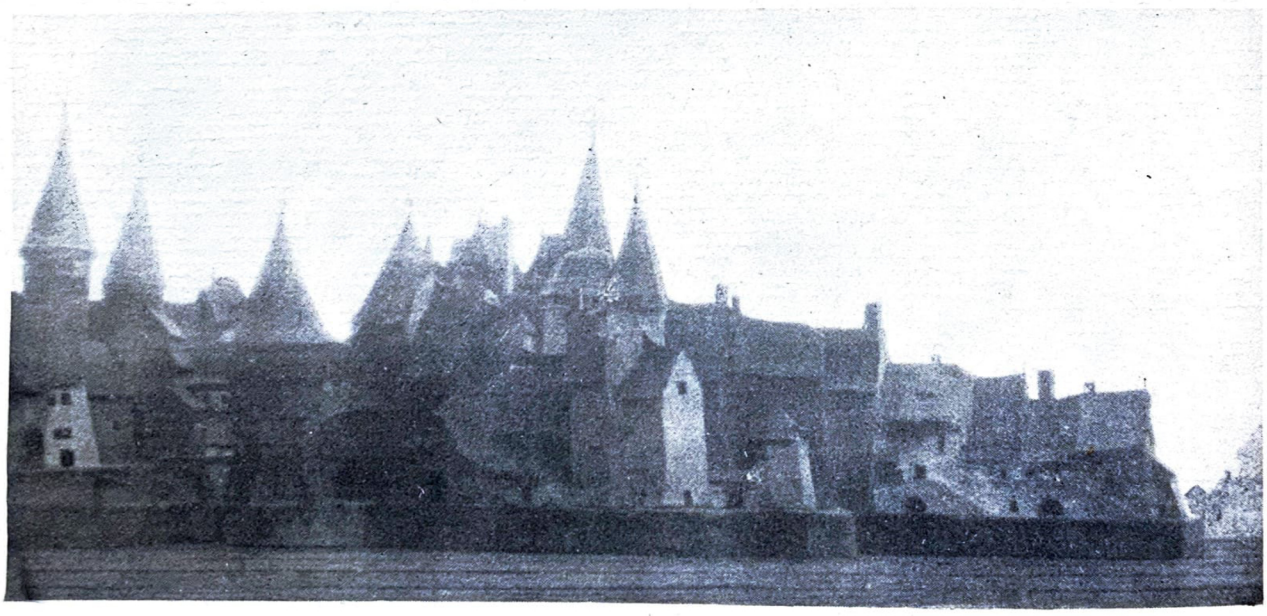
BEATRICE

She has a milk-and-rose complexion and golden hair and eyebrows; her bonnet is vermilion, gold, and green. (Property of Mr. Rolf Armstrong.)

THE OLD TOWN

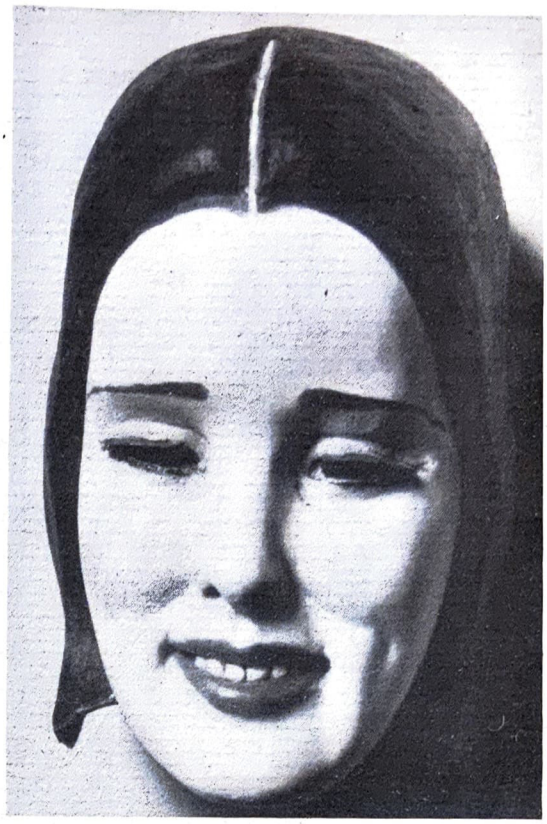
An imaginary old town in Northern France. This model by the author was built of heavy cardboard, bound with layers of paper. It is in four sections which can be variously grouped. Its purpose is to serve as background for mask pantomime. The scale is one-eighth inch to the foot.

1922

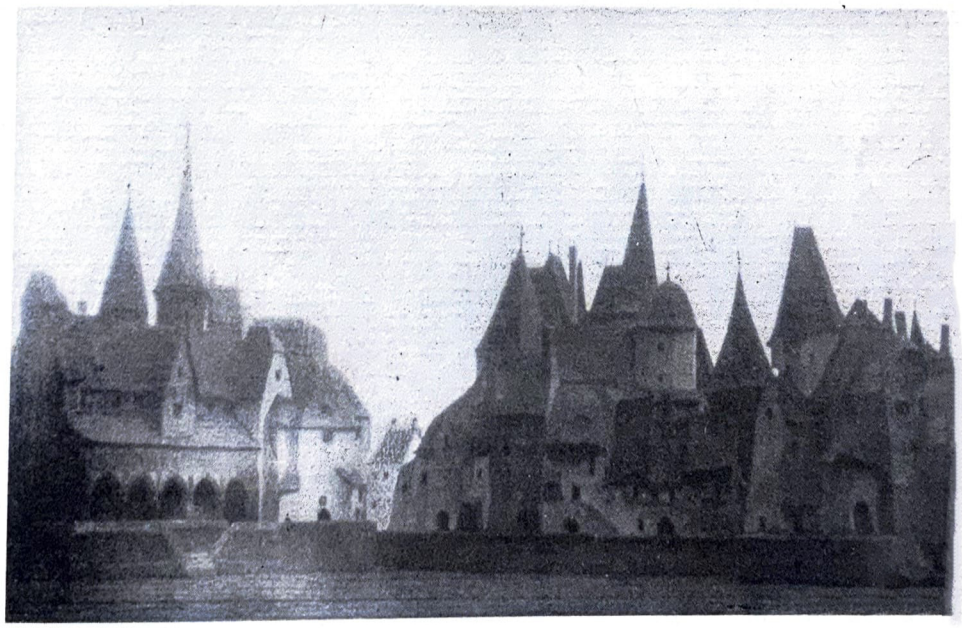


RUSALKA

Rusalkas are the mischievous Slavonic wood nymphs or dryads who lure young men of Poland and Russia into deep woods, whence they never come back.



1933



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WENDINGEN MASKERNUMMER, 1920

Index

African masks, 13
Algerian Dancer, 76
American Indian masks, 10-12
Anderson, John Murray, ix, 54
Armature, wire, 32, 40
Ascetic, The, 101
Asian masks, 15

Baboon Man, 74
Balinese masks, 17
Beatrice, 122
Beauté du Diable, 76
Beelzebub, 7, 75
Bird of Prey, 93
Blue Demon, The, 52, 86, 97
Bornean masks, 18

Calif Al Mansur, 115
Cambodjan masks, 18
Cardboard method, 41
Chapman, John Jay, viii, 54
Chinese Demon, 87
Chinese masks, 16
Choosing a theme, 21
Christie, Grace, ix, 54, 104
Cicisbeo, 82
Circassian, 70, 104
Cleopatra, 117
Cochran, C. B., 54
Coffee House Club, viii, 54
Comedia dell' arte, 19
Comedy Club, 54
Conspirator, The, 71
Coward, Noel, x
Craig, Edward Gordon, 57
Crowninshield, Frank, vii, 54

Daphne, 118
Direct method, 34, 38, 39
Dolorosa, 81
Don Quixote, 98
Durability of masks, 42

Eagle, 7
Eagle Man, 71
Encyclopaedia Britannica, x, 105
English Statesman, 78
Executioner, 88
Eyes, 5

Fitting of masks, 44
Furia, 7, 93

Gallery of Benda Masks, 67-123
Geisha, 108
Gilding of masks, 36
Gold leaf, 36
Golden Beauty, 70, 72
Golden Goddess, 102
Golden Peacock, xx, 109, 116
Goodrich, Chas. C., 54
Greek masks, 9, 18
Greek Tragoedia Mask, 87
Greenley, Howard, ix, 54
Greenwich Village Follies, ix, 46, 54
Grotesque masks, 55

Hepburn, Katharine, 44, 59, 94
Human heads, sizes and proportions, 46
Human skulls, comparative, 49

Illusions, 1
Insect, The, 116
Inspirational sources, 21

Japanese masks, 16
Javanese Dancer, 91, 103

Javanese masks, 17
Jester, The, 79
Jinnee, A, 95
Johnson, Owen, ix
Jones, Robert Edmond, x

Kinds of masks, 44

Lady Disdain, 80
Lawyer, The, 121
League of Notions, ix
L'homme d'Affaires, 120
Lincoln, Abraham, 43, 113
London Alhambra, 54
Long Eyes, 73, 90

Materials, 30, 31
Methods, 31-42
Miser, The, 110
Moorish Girl, 104
Moron, 106
Mystery plays, 19

New York Architectural League, 54
Nincompoop, 7, 107

Oceanian masks, 14
Octogenarian, 98
Odalisque, 77
Old Town, The, 122, 123
Old Wag, The, 69
O'Neill, Eugene, x

Paderewski, I. J., 43, 112
Painting the mask, 33, 35
Pestilence, 62, 83
Phoenix, 92
Pirate, 110
Pithecanthropus, 100
Plutocrat, 111
Polish Jaselka, 20
Practical considerations, 44
Prehistoric European masks, 18
Preliminary studies, 47, 48

Radio City Music Hall, 56
Ramhorn, 86, 99
Roman masks, 9, 18
Rusalka, 123

Sad Negro, A, 84
Sappho, 119
Sea Monster, 86
Severn, Margaret, ix, 54
Siamese masks, 18
Silent masks, 43
Silly Doll, 7, 105, 117
Sioux Indian, 114
Smith, Henry Clapp, ix
Soldier, A, 111
Spirit of War, The, 89
Steichen, Edward, ix
Steinway, Theodore, ix
Swiss masks, 20
Sumurun, 58

Tatianka, 105
Three Maidens, 70
Tibetan masks, 15
Tools for mask-making, 42
Towne, Charles Hanson, ix
Types of masks, 43
Tyrolean masks, 20

Ubangi Negro, 85

Vanity Fair, viii, 54
Varesi, Gilda, ix
Varnishing the mask, 33, 35
Veteran, A, 99
Village Scribe, A, 83
Vogue, ix
Voyevode, 82

Wabbly Goblin, 92
Will-o'-the-wisp, 96
Wire armature method, 40

Zimbalist, Efrem, ix